FOSTERING CRITICAL COUNTERSPACES IN THE BORDERLANDS: ENGAGING LATIN@ ELEMENTARY YOUTH IN CHICAN@ STUDIES

by

Socorro Morales

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The dissertation of **Socorro Morales**

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

Dolores Delgado Bernal	, Chair	**05/05/2016** Date Approved
Enrique Alemán, Jr	, Member	 Date Approved
Dolores Calderón	, Member	**05/05/2016** Date Approved
Frank Margonis	, Member	**05/05/2016** Date Approved
Wanda Pillow	, Member	**05/05/2016** Date Approved

and by **Edward Buendía** , Chair of

the Department of **Education, Culture, and Society**

and by David B. Kieda, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

Chican@ and Latin@ students have persistently had low high school graduation rates, as well as low college matriculation and completion rates. A wide range of literature suggests that ethnic studies-based educational approaches can positively engage students of color academically, in ways that markedly improve their academic achievement. However, the implications for implementing these types of rigorous, curricular models in elementary school settings for youth of color have yet to be fully explored.

In filling this gap, this research project is an ethnographic, qualitative case study that utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education and Anzaldúa's Borderlands, in the design and implementation of an after school Chican@ centric course for fifth-grade Latin@ elementary youth. Drawing from the CRT literature on counterspaces, this research centered the process of co-developing a Chican@ studies counterspace (the after school course) with fifth-grade youth. Specifically, this research examined how the counterspace impacted the students' understanding of their own raced, classed, and sexed positionalities.

Findings from this study illuminate the complex and multifaceted nature of developing counterspaces with Latin@ youth, and by extension young people of color. Specifically, the curriculum and pedagogy developed within and for the counterspace centered Chicana/Latina feminist ways of knowing. Both a Chican@

border/transformative pedagogy and a muxerista pedagogy allowed me to inform and frame my work within a Chicana/Latina feminist approach, one that encouraged a practice of bringing in our whole and multiple selves. Though many men of color have written about pedagogical practices with young people of color in their scholarship, they often do not centralize a feminista praxis in their pedagogy. Feminist pedagogical praxis allows one to center healing, the bodymindspirit, and contradiction as integral parts connected to the way that we learn and engage with one another. In particular, feminist of color frameworks center the body as a pedagogical tool. I argue that pedagogical frameworks that work to make sense of contradiction and center desire can lead to recognizing and understanding possibilities for healing and transformation, particularly within counterspaces.

Dedicated to my mother Evelia Ramirez, and my brother Daniel Morales, and the resilient and brilliant youth at Jackson Elementary.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Vignette: Los Tigres Del Norte and Immigration

As I walk into Ms. Peterson's[1] fifth-grade classroom, I am slightly nervous about how this year's Oral History Project (OHP) with her class will go. The OHP projects are critical,[2] curricular projects that are implemented in conjunction with Spanish dual-language teachers at Jackson Elementary,[3] where this research project takes place. The previous year (2012) a colleague and I who work together to coordinate these projects decided on the theme of "Music of my Home," where we focused specifically on music as a means of centering student identity. Though the project was conceptually appealing, putting it into practice was difficult. When we revamped this OHP, we decided it would be best to provide specific examples through modeling of how we wanted the students to structure/analyze their projects. Thus, we selected three songs, two in English and one in Spanish, that we felt could potentially connect to the students' lives, or that they would at least be familiar with. For each song, our plan was to show students the music video, as

[1] The names used throughout this research study are pseudonyms unless otherwise specified.
[2] I utilize the word "critical" in this research project in alignment with conceptions and origins of critical theory (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013). Critical, then, is used to signify a challenge to the status quo, relations of power, and agency against forms of subordination.
[3] Jackson Elementary is the actual name of the school where this research took place. Several scholars have written research articles about Jackson, and it is a well-known school in the district because it is one of the only schools in Salt Lake City that houses a school-community-university partnership. For this reason, the identity of the school would be difficult to conceal.

well as hand out the lyrics, and then debrief/discuss as a class the themes of the song along with who the artist was attempting to target with their music.

For this first class meeting (which happened in the fall of 2012), the song that we chose was "La Jaula de Oro" by Los Tigres Del Norte. A Mexican Norteño group, Los Tigres Del Norte often focus their music on social issues, but in particular that of immigration. Though this song was popular in the 80s, we thought that not only were the themes still relevant to the lives of young people today, but we also suspected that the students themselves might be familiar with the song given the musical interests of their parents. As we began to search for the song and accompanying music video via YouTube to display on the projector, I noticed the students getting restless and eager to see which song we had chosen to show them in class. We then distributed the lyrics to the song and instructed the students to pay attention to the specific themes, or message(s) that the artists were trying to communicate to their audience. Then, we played the music video.

As the music video was playing, I worried that the students might laugh at how old the video was, or that they would think the song was "too Mexican" for them to like it because it was Norteño music. Having spent the majority of their lives living in the U.S., many of the students listened primarily to music in English. In my observation of students while the video was playing, I could see some of them laughing at certain parts of the song, including the artists' haircuts and form of dress. I also observed two students who were silently moving their lips and nodding their heads slightly, presumably because they were familiar with the song or at least enjoyed listening to it. Once the song was over, we led a class discussion on what the themes were, and how (if so) were they relevant to their own lives today.

The discussion which ensued after we finished playing the song was interesting for a number of reasons. First, the students immediately identified the theme of immigration or migration that the song explicitly discussed. However, they went beyond just saying it was about immigration, by placing the song within contemporary discourses about undocumented immigrants and undocumented communities. In fact, some of them identified being either undocumented themselves or having family members who were undocumented and therefore could face deportation. The students did not use the word "undocumented" but they did refer to their family members as "not having papers" or "not being able to go back to Mexico." I observed the nonverbal cues of their teacher, who remained quiet throughout most of the discussion, and it seemed that at times she was uncomfortable with students "revealing too much" information about their lives. In other words, though students were openly sharing personal stories of family members who "did not have papers," it seemed that she did not want students to focus on themselves, but rather on the song. However, this was essentially contrary to how we envisioned this OHP lesson, in that we wanted students to focus on the song as a way for them to tap into their familial knowledge and personal experiences.

In particular, one Mexicano student by the name of Jesus was actively participating in class discussion. He was one of the first ones to raise his hand when asked "what themes did you see in this video" and was engaged throughout. It was during this in-class discussion when he revealed, perhaps somewhat unknowingly, his citizenship status. When he raised his hand to talk about the theme of "migration" he commented, "I know that if I were to go back to Mexico to see my family, I couldn't come back here. This is why I can never go, and I haven't seen them in such a long time."

Jesus clearly understood the implications of what "going back to Mexico" meant without papers. He would not be able to come back. Throughout this discussion he continually referenced "not having papers" as "not being fair" because it restricted "things people could do" like "driving."

It was during classroom moments like the one I described above with students and with teachers who were uncomfortable with engaging students in these social issues, where I found myself wondering, what social critique would young Latin@s[4] talk about if given the space? If we could expand on such conversations further, where would these conversations lead us? Through a combination of my personal and professional experiences, as well as my cultural insights as a second-generation immigrant, working-class Chicana (Delgado Bernal, 1998), this research project focuses on the critical dialogues I had with upper elementary aged Latin@ youth.[5] Specifically, this research examines the process of co-developing a Critical Race counterspace[6] with fifth-grade Latin@ and Chican@ youth.[7] My experiences working in the classroom with Latin@

[4] Soto (2010) utilizes the @ when referencing Chican@s and Latin@s as a part of what she describes as a "conscientious departure from certainty, mastery, and wholeness, while still announcing a politicized collectivity" (p. 2). In this way, Soto argues that the @ is a move away from the more traditional Chicana/Chicano term that signals a man or a woman specifically, and rejects the certainty with which those terms are used to designate gender identity. Rather, she argues, the @ challenges how we perceive gender identity in that it "refuses the norms of legibility and the burdens of visibility" (Soto, 2010, p. 2), in this way making gender less visible and less "knowable." Males and females in this study are referred to by their gender pronoun (e.g., Latina).

[5] I specifically utilize the term "upper elementary aged youth" here to illustrate the population that this research focuses on. Throughout these chapters, I make clear distinctions when I am talking about high school aged youth or elementary aged youth. In most cases when I am talking about elementary aged youth, I am specifically referencing the upper grades, grades 4th-6th.

[6] The term counterspace is one that will be further elaborated on in Chapter 2, as it forms a large part of this research project. For the purposes of briefly defining it here, I understand counterspaces to be both formal and informal spaces that lead to collective support and validation for racialized experiences in particular, but marginalized realities more generally which has the potential to then lead to collective agency or action.

[7] I do not necessarily use the terms Chican@ interchangeably with Latin@, though I recognize that oftentimes scholars make them connected. I foreground Chican@ within a certain political and historical movement, while Latin@ is more of a reflection of the broader scope of thinking about colonized peoples from Latin America as well as Mexico. Additionally, I also utilize the term Chican@ to signify people of Mexican origin or descent.

youth via in particular the Oral History Projects, allowed me to develop close relationships with many of them. It was through these relationships that developed over the course of several years that I began to learn more about the lives of students and their families, and specifically how they understood themselves as racialized, classed, and sexed individuals within a broader society. Sharing experiences that were (and are) tied to our positionalities, I found that myself and the students were able to connect with each other on multiple levels, in ways that seemed different from the relationships they had with their classroom teachers. Recognizing how young people and particularly elementary aged young people are dismissed because of their age, I sought to co-create a space with them where they could have more opportunities to speak and be heard.

This study then, was about the process of what it meant to co-construct a counterspace with fifth-grade Latin@ youth. It primarily centered on better understanding how Latin@ elementary aged youth engaged in critical discourses and dialogues with one another. It also specifically sought to understand the impact that a counterspace, but particularly one that centered Chican@ studies related material and discourses, would have on these fifth-grade youth. In other words, the counterspace that we developed incorporated discussions that were specific to better understanding the varied experiences of Chican@s living within a U.S. context. Lastly, this research project also sought to understand how, within our Chican@ studies counterspace, Latin@ youth made sense of themselves in light of the dialogues that we had and also as a result of how they learned from and engaged with their peers. The following research questions guide this study.

Research Questions

1. What is the process of co-constructing a Chican@ studies counterspace for/with fifth-grade Latin@ students?
2. What types of relationships and interactions are present within this Chican@ studies counterspace?
3. How do fifth-grade Latin@ students engage in critical dialogue and self-reflection within this counterspace?

Statement of the Problem: The Latin@ Educational Pipeline, Elementary Aged Youth, and the Need to Create Critical Spaces in Schools

The educational attainment of Chican@s and Latin@s has been well documented as being disproportionately lower than their White counterparts (Pérez-Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sánchez, & Solorzano, 2006; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Valencia, 2004; Yosso, 2006). More specifically, the notion of the "educational pipeline" refers to the way that students are funneled through k-12 institutions and into higher education. The metaphor of a "pipeline" is used to signal "flow" or transition of students from different educational institutions, ultimately with the hope and prospect of college graduation. However, students of color,[8] and in particular Chican@s, face numerous institutional and structural barriers to achieving higher levels of educational attainment (Gonzalez, 2001). As Pérez-Huber et al. (2006) write,

[8] I use the terms students of color, people of color, and communities of color much in the same fashion in which Yosso (2006) does in order to refer to "African-American, Native American, Chican@s, Latin@s, and Asian Americans, [who are] also referred to as racial 'minorities' or underrepresented groups" (p. 17).

> These [Latin@] students are not being prepared to make a successful transition into high school, resulting in tremendous dropout[9] rates. High dropout rates continue for the students who do make it to college. Latin@ students are severely underrepresented at four-year colleges and universities and in graduate and professional programs. (p. 2)

In other words, Latin@s broadly and Chican@s more specifically, though increasingly growing in number within the U.S., do not graduate high school or college in rates proportional to their growth (Pérez Huber, Malagón, Ramirez, Camargo Gonzalez, Jimenez & Vélez, 2015). Given the colonial history (and present context) of schooling (Calderón, 2014), these numbers are not surprising (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013). However, as critical educators interested in social justice agendas, there is an urgent need to drastically improve the Latin@ educational pipeline.

Making positive change and impacting the Latin@ educational pipeline can start at any age. However, most research on college student success suggests that the earlier students and their families begin to consider college as an option, the more likely students are to end up pursuing a higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Far too often, critical educators, and in particular critical youth studies educators, focus on students at the high school level (Akom, Ginwright, & Cammarota, 2008; Cammarota & Romero, 2014). The reasoning and rationale behind this can be multifold. High school students are closer to graduation. Therefore one does not have to "wait long" before noting the impact of critical curriculum and pedagogical practice. Additionally, high school students have more experience with schooling institutions than younger grades and educators can

[9] The term "dropout" referring to a student who has left high school and does not graduate is often found in numerous educational reports and is also an educational statistical category. Many scholars (Fine, 1991) have shifted the framing of this word, to place more responsibility on the institution rather than the individual student. As such, the term "pushout" is more accurate with regard to understanding why students of color choose to leave high school. Whenever the word "dropout" is used, it is because that is the statistical designation/category for students who leave high school.

utilize such experiences in critical discussions. At the same time, elementary aged youth of color are too often forgotten in the broader discourse on youth and youth of color. This is not to say that such critical educators assume that elementary aged youth do not understand or possess social critique. Even so, elementary aged youth of color still remain largely unincorporated within the broader discourses on youth of color and in particular, addressing ways that elementary aged youth can be critically engaged within schooling institutions.

The dominant discourse and constructions of youth of color, specifically within a U.S. context, is often dismissive of their assets and of their ability to be engaged, critical, and reflective thinkers. More often than not, the discourse around youth of color is framed along the lines of delinquency, inadequate judgment, and lack of complex and critical thinking. As a social category, "youth" carries with it various meanings, but in particular the focus has been on how youth are in a middle space between childhood and adulthood, and therefore cannot rationalize in the same ways that adults can (Akom et al., 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Lesko, 2012). This becomes especially true of youth of color, whose age, skin color, gender, racial/ethnic background, for example, intersect in ways that perpetuate ideologies which shape them as deficit, lacking sophistication, and destined to a life of crime and poverty (Valenzuela, 1999). In other words, youth of color are seen as not only limited in their capacities because of their age, but additionally because of their race/ethnicity (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Cammarota & Romero, 2014).

Dominant narratives of youth position them as being vulnerable, yet at the same time dangerous (Lesko, 2012), and needing guidance to protect them from themselves. These dominant discourses are shaped by universalistic, psychological developmental

models which are believed to account for all types of human development, both physical and mental. Most notably, Piaget is the "father" of this commonly used and referenced developmental model. Concepts like *concrete* and *abstract* thinking, therefore, become abilities that you can perform only after reaching a certain age. This model largely influences in particular how teachers and educators go about teaching youth of all ages.

Developmental psychology models of aging and adolescence, and psychology as a field of study more generally are also embedded with racism, as are many other academic disciplines (Gonzalez, 2001). Intelligence testing, for example, derived out of the field of psychology is but one example of how racial categories were used to justify racial stratification. Today as much as historically, intelligence testing has been dominated by tests developed around a White, male, Christian, heterosexual norm which continues to view those outside of this norm as deviant, and worthy of nothing more than subservience (Valencia, 1999). Youth of color are "limited" not only developmentally due to their age, but additionally because of a colonial legacy and history which has deemed people of color as being outright unintelligible (Valencia, 1999). These trends and ideologies are evident today in the way that many youth of color are pushed out of schools, restricted in the types of rigorous academic courses they have access to (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004) and the overall poor schooling conditions that youth of color are exposed to (Kozol, 1991; 2005).

Recognizing how multiple broken systems function in the lives of young people of color, including health care, schools and employment prospects, several critical youth studies scholars highlight how young people are not merely subjects that are "acted upon" (Cammarota & Romero, 2010; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006; Morrell, 2002;

Quijada 2008; Torre & Fine, 2006; Tuck, 2009a). Their strategies of resistance take on multiple forms and are often thoughtful critiques to the ways that they make sense of themselves within a broader context. Seen as both the answer to and the reason behind society's many problems (Quijada, 2008), youth of color are contradictorily positioned as both the problem and the solution. They are caught between a dialectic that positions them as either/or, and are often not recognized for the multiple ways they choose to express themselves and their subject positions (Quijada, 2008; Tuck, 2009b). Additionally, the decisions of adults continue to largely shape the context that youth of color experience as young people. In this way, young people are often restricted or limited by how "vocal" they can be regarding the systematic issues (such as access to poor schooling conditions) they see within their communities. For this reason, it is important to understand youth of color from the specific contexts in which they live, theorize, and make sense of the world (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006).

Though recognizing the age of youth is helpful if not necessary for educational purposes, a universalistic approach to youth of color severely limits the capacity that we allow them to have when thinking critically about "reading the word and the world" (Freire, 1970). In a very basic sense, I am arguing here that dominant discourse has perpetuated the perception that youth of color are limited in the knowledge they possess, and in particular, elementary aged youth of color are seen as even *less* capable than their older counterparts of possessing critical social critique and knowledge.

What I have presented thus far are two problematic dominant perspectives which I am weaving together, in ways not unlike other critical scholars/educators: 1) that Latin@ students are disproportionately and systemically being pushed out of the educational

pipeline and 2) that youth of color are positioned in limiting ways and additionally are only somewhat visible during their teen years, not prior. The reason why I am combining these two dominant perspectives as problems that need to be addressed is because of my experience working with Latin@ elementary aged youth, who are even less visible because of their age, gender and ethnic identity. Part of my aim for conducting this research is speaking back to those dominant discourses.

Many critical educators recognize the ways that schooling institutions in particular stifle young people from critically interrogating the social constructions of "who" they are (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Malagón, 2010; Revilla, 2012; Romero, 2008; Romero & Arce, 2009). Purposefully, schools ensure that young people of color are not given tools to critically analyze themselves or their communities. Similar to the way that Black slaves were not taught or allowed to learn how to read, young people of color today are not provided with opportunities in schools to learn about themselves, nor to positively affirm their own existence (hooks, 2003). The "masses" of color are easier to control if their histories and legacies are kept from them and instead they are shrouded in ignorance and self-hate (DuBois, 1994). Knowing and recognizing the role of schools in maintaining this ignorance, it comes as no surprise that young people of color need spaces where they can learn from one another and theorize collectively in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983).

This research project specifically examined the possibilities that exist when Latin@ youth have access to a critical and relational space that allows them to share their awareness of their positionalities and knowledges from home (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Though many critical youth studies scholars already do this in different

variations, they do not examine what such a space looks like with elementary aged youth of color. Additionally, much of the discourse within the field of critical youth studies in education centers a male perspective. One of the major tasks that this research has undertaken has been the centering of a feminist of color praxis, both in the curriculum and pedagogically. One of the goals of this project was to address the issue of elementary aged youth of color not having a critical space in school by co-constructing one. In so doing, my aim was to challenge dominant conceptions of this age group. In co-constructing a counterspace with youth, I also sought to explicitly center a Chicana feminist approach to developing this space. Not only does a Chicana feminist approach stem from my own personal experiences and positionality, but additionally it allows me to center a practice of bringing in our whole and multiple selves, a practice often ignored in male-centered approaches (Elenes, 2006; 2011; Revilla, 2004).

I began this chapter with a short vignette detailing one example of why I became interested in this specific research project. I then followed with the research questions that informed this study, as well as a statement of the problem, or the broader discourse that this research aims to address. The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows: a description of the research project, a description of the study context and setting, the primary theoretical frameworks that informed this study, the methods of the study, and lastly, the significance of the study.

The Current Study: Co-Constructing a Counterspace With Latin@ Youth

As has been previously mentioned, it was my teaching experiences in the OHP with Latin@ elementary aged youth that inspired me to envision how we could more effectively engage in discussing critical topics. More specifically, I wanted to better understand how I could develop a space with youth where we could address being undocumented, for example, more openly, rather than in a classroom space with a teacher who visibly demonstrated discomfort. I sought to create a space where we would not be as constrained by the school atmosphere and teachers who often dismissed students' realities in favor of colorblindness. I also wanted to create a space where students could access materials and a language that would help them make sense of their experiences related to their positionalities. I wanted them to feel that their knowledges and experiences mattered and are indeed valid.

Working together as OHP co-coordinators, myself and Sylvia Mendoza (a colleague and good friend of mine) spent hours discussing our experiences working with young Latin@ youth. We attempted to make sense of our experiences in relationship to how we remember our k-12, but particularly our experiences at the elementary level. It was through these conversations where we collectively shared ideas and theorized about how we wanted to work with youth in a way that would validate their multiple knowledges. In this theorizing is where we fostered the idea of co-developing and co-implementing an after school college class for fifth-grade and sixth-grade Latin@ youth.[10]

[10] It should be noted here that although myself and Sylvia shared ideas about how we wanted to design and develop this class, we still had different ways that we approached and thought about the course. For

In wanting to co-develop a space where Latin@ youth could be more open about their various positionalities, I found that the literature related to Critical Race counterspaces was particularly helpful in this endeavor (Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Although I elaborate on counterspaces in more extensive detail in Chapter 2, I will briefly describe them here. Cited for being "…sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged" (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 70), counterspaces provided a language and tool for me to understand how I could co-develop a space with young Brown[11] youth where we could engage in critical discussions that challenged dominant narratives. Specifically, in reading the literature that was on counterspaces, I understood our idea of wanting to develop a college class with Latin@ youth as a counterspace, in that we would be able to counter deficit notions of people of color within that space. Given my experiences working with Brown youth through the Adelante partnership, which I discuss below, I felt that a counterspace would be able to support my goals of wanting to engage youth critically, particularly in light of how difficult this often was during the regular school day, given the various restrictions in the school day schedule and an emphasis on teaching to the test (Raible & Irizarry, 2010).

The after school counterspace was framed as a "college class" because Sylvia and I wanted to reinforce the already present college going culture at Jackson Elementary. Jackson Elementary was a part of the Adelante partnership. Specifically, the Adelante partnership, which we were OHP coordinators for, is a community-university-school

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example, I talk here about how I understood the college class as a counterspace. However, Sylvia did not necessarily make sense of it in the same way. As two doctoral students at the time, we were each responsible for developing our own separate research projects, and what I share throughout this study is how I conceptualized my research within the specific frameworks that I utilized.

[11] I capitalize the word Brown here and throughout these chapters, in a vein similar to the way that Black scholars capitalize the term Black, demonstrating its importance and using the capitalization as a means of empowerment.

partnership designed to disrupt the dismal Latin@ educational pipeline by providing exposure to college mentors, college resources, and college itself via university fieldtrips, mentoring, and cultural enrichment (Alemán, Delgado Bernal, & Cortez, 2015; Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Flores Carmona, 2008). In framing our counterspace as a college class, our hope was that students would take up and embody a discourse tied to college, specifically that of a college student taking a college class. Furthermore, the purpose of making this college class a Chican@ studies course was tied to wanting to engage students in culturally responsive material that would speak to their lived realities. Lastly, we wanted to use the discourse of Chican@ studies to provide an example of an actual college major that students could take courses in, as well as concepts that they could further explore in college if they so desired.

We put these ideas into a pilot study, which took place during the 2013-2014 school year. We designed a critical Chican@ studies curriculum, focusing specifically on issues related to but not limited by race, racism, gender discrimination, and immigration status. Though the pilot study is not the focus of this research, the experience of having done the pilot for 9 months (September-April) provided insight into how I thought about the design for the 2014-2015 school year. For example, the 2014-2015 cohort consisted of only fifth-graders, instead of both fifth and sixth combined.

In summary, this research project explored how elementary aged Brown youth made sense of themselves as a result of participating in an after school, Chican@ studies counterspace, which was known by the students as a college class.[12] This counterspace was co-developed and co-implemented by myself and Sylvia. The curriculum for the

[12] Throughout this study, I often refer to the specific counterspace from this study as the college class. Thus, when talking about the context of this study, I use these terms interchangeably.

counterspace, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, centered Critical Race curricular (Yosso, 2002) concepts that focused on forms of subordination such as racism and gender discrimination. The pedagogical approach that I took for the counterspace, which is also elaborated on in Chapter 3, centered a feminista, muxerista praxis that embraced tensions and contradictions as well as multiple positionalities (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Elenes, 2006; 2011; Revilla, 2004). In the next section, I set the context for the study which took place in a community of color in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Study Context: In the "Reddest of the Red" [13]

This study took place in Salt Lake City, Utah, a majority "red" (i.e., conservative) state (Alemán, 2009). The city's geographical mapping with regard to where populations of people and resources are located, is in many ways similar to other large cities where clear markers of racial and economic segregation are evident (Buendía, Ares, Juarez, & Peercy, 2004). In particular, what divides the Salt Lake City Valley is Interstate 15, a major freeway that runs as far south as Chula Vista, CA and as far north as the Canadian border. Common signifiers that are used in Salt Lake City to differentiate people both racially and economically are "West Side" and "East Side" (Buendía et al., 2004). Though the dividing line between East Side and West Side is a bit nebulous, one dividing line is thought to be Interstate 15. That is, those who live on the "West Side" are typically of color (majority Latin@), and lower income than those who live on the "East Side," who are primarily White and middle to upper income. The University of Utah is located

[13] Taken from Alemán (2009), p. 292.

on the "East Side" along with the state capitol. However, many students on the "West Side" (often not living more than a 20-25-minute drive away from the university) are typically not familiar with nor given exposure to university or college life.

The signifiers "East" and "West" carry not only connotations regarding race and socioeconomic status, but additionally deficit notions regarding people of color and communities of color (Buendía et al., 2004; Valencia, 1997). Thus, when someone comes from the "West Side" there are both implied and overt notions about who and what this person is. And given the growing number of Latin@s in Salt Lake City specifically and Utah more generally (Perlich, 2004), it comes as no surprise that deficit thinking pervades the perception of Salt Lake City's "West Side" (Alemán, 2009). Local Salt Lake City newspaper articles and media outlets also fuel and funnel these perceptions (Buendía et al., 2004). And they additionally make it clear who lives in which communities. For example, an article released in 2013 by Salt Lake City Weekly entitled "What Makes Salt Lake City so White?" is an example of the clear geographical demarcations that separate white from "of color" within Salt Lake City. As stated in the article, "…Salt Lake City's large white population is concentrated more on the east and south sides of the valley. Hispanics, also large in number, are more populous the farther west you go" (Smith, 2013, np). In this way, media serves as a way of reinforcing the clear distinctions between those who live on the "East Side" and the "West Side."

I place Jackson Elementary within the backdrop of the larger Salt Lake City area, but more specifically its "West Side" because the context matters when it comes to Jackson students. It matters not only because it shapes their daily lived experiences living in a "West Side" community, but it also informs perceptions that people have of Latin@

Jackson students, as well as their ability to access the university and college more generally. Salt Lake City politics, not surprisingly, mirror dominant, conservative "racist nativist" narratives about immigration but specifically immigrant and undocumented Latin@s (Alemán, 2009; Pérez-Huber, 2009). These politics play out within a context of Mormon[14] "niceness" (Alemán, 2009) and allow for Whiteness in Salt Lake City to be masked under the guise of "ignorance" as well as "genuine" interest for diverse peoples. In other words, people of differing racial/ethnic backgrounds are seen as "just people" in Salt Lake City, a form of colorblindness which becomes interwoven with church ideals of "equality." Thus, the way that Whiteness and racism function within Salt Lake City is similar, yet different from the way it functions within a broader U.S. context.

In particular, the LDS Church has a loud and dominant voice in Salt Lake City politics. Alcohol regulations are just one example of how the LDS church dominates daily practice. Many Mormons embody a strong sense of colorblindness because of LDS church politics that reinforce majoritarian narratives (Yosso, 2006) about race. Mormonism additionally views people of color, and specifically those with darker skin tones, as needing religion in order to save them. The LDS faith (similar to other religions) carries with it a history of believing that indigenous people, typically with darker skin, referred to as Lamanites, were damned by God (Stack, 2010). This history comes to fruition through Mormon missionaries who are frequently sent to third-world countries to "save" targeted populations of people of color and indigenous peoples who are impoverished. Following a majoritarian narrative, people of color are often viewed through a deficit lens by many Mormons. I am not suggesting that all Mormons have this

[14] Salt Lake City in particular and Utah generally is known as the "Mecca" for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) or Mormons.

view. However, the point I make here is that the influence of church doctrine runs deep among active Mormons. Jackson students are impacted daily by these politics on varying levels, particularly because some of the students I have worked with are a part of the LDS church.

Salt Lake City School District (SLCSD) demographics reflect the ethnic/racial separation between the "East" and "West" side in very concrete ways (see Figure 1). Schools that are located on the "West" side contain student demographics that are majority students of color, while the opposite is true of schools on the "East" side. For example, Backman Elementary, a school located on the "West" side has a student body that is 91% students of color (76% Latin@) and only 9% White[15] (Salt Lake City School District, 2015a). In contrast, Beacon Heights Elementary, located on the "East" side and only 2 miles from the University of Utah, has a student body that is 72% White, with Asian Americans being the second largest ethnic/racial group at 17% (Salt Lake City School District, 2015a). These data are represented graphically in Figure 2. These student demographics are very much reflected across the board for "East" and "West" schools in Salt Lake City, from grades k-12.

The gifted and talented program, known as the Extended Learning Program (ELP) in the SLCSD, is available almost exclusively to "East" side schools (Salt Lake City School District, 2016). ELP opportunities for elementary students (grades 4-6) are available at their schools as pull out programs, known as Neighborhood Part Time Programs (Salt Lake City School District, 2016). These pull out programs provide ELP

[15] Enrollment reports, including demographic data, are taken October 1st of each year for the district. Thus, the demographic data from the district that I share here were taken October 1st, 2015, and would include students who were enrolled in the 2015-2016 school year.

eligible students with 2 hours per week of "extended instruction." Hawthorne and Whittier Elementary have full time Magnet programs housed within the school, both of which are located on the "East" side. Emerson Elementary, one of the only Spanish dual-immersion schools located on the "East" side, also contains an "in-house" ELP for students. Specifically, this one is a two-way Spanish immersion ELP (Salt Lake City School District, 2016). Though Latin@s comprise 14% of Emerson's overall student body, Latin@s enrolled in Emerson's ELP comprise 31% of the total (Salt Lake City School District, 2015a). One of the reasons for this is that dual language programs often require between 30%-50% native speakers of the language other than English (Crawford, 2004). In this case, it is likely that the Latin@s enrolled in Emerson's ELP are native Spanish speakers.

For "West" side students who wish to participate in full time ELP opportunities, there is only one school located on the "West" side that provides them this chance, West High School. West High houses a full time Magnet program for seventh and eighth graders, and additionally houses an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program for high school students. It is also the only "West" side school that offers both Honors and AP courses (Salt Lake City School District, 2016). West High, considered to be one of the more diverse schools in the district, has a student body that is 45% Latin@, with Whites being the second largest group at 32% (Salt Lake City School District, 2015a). Operating as a "school within a school" (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004), Whites comprise 64% of those enrolled in the IB program, while Latin@s only comprise 7.6% (Salt Lake City School District, 2015a). Thus, the clear patterns of educational disparity present within

the SLCSD are reflective of the national trends of educational inequity that exist between White students and students of color.

Jackson Elementary (pre-k through sixth-grade) is located on the "West Side" of Salt Lake City, with a majority student of color population. In the 2015-2016 school year, Jackson's student of color population totaled 85% of the student body, with Latin@s comprising 69% (Salt Lake City School District, 2015a). The total number of students enrolled at Jackson for the 2015-2016 academic year was 496 (Salt Lake City School District, 2015a). Jackson is a Title I school, with 89% of the student body designated as free and reduced lunch eligible (Salt Lake City School District, 2015b). In the 2014-2015 school year, there were a total of 30 teachers at Jackson (Utah State Office of Education, 2016). Jackson has a 50/50 dual immersion strand (Crawford, 2004), as well as an English only strand. Despite the two strands at Jackson, there are many Latin@ students who are bilingual, but for purposes of overflow as well as test scores are placed into English only classrooms. Many families at Jackson come from immigrant backgrounds, including a number of families who have undocumented family members.

As has been previously mentioned, Jackson Elementary is the site for the Adelante Partnership, a joint community-university-school intervention effort designed to combat the current Chican@ and Latin@ educational pipeline (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Flores Carmona, 2008). Adelante has one basic premise at its core:

> [Adelante] believes all young people in this [Jackson] largely Latina/o community should be prepared for, enroll in, and succeed in college. [Adelante] believes college preparation must emphasize students' intellectual development in relation to community and culture. (Delgado Bernal, Alemán, & Flores Carmona, 2008, p. 33)

Adelante then, has worked largely towards emphasizing and promoting a college going culture at Jackson such that college can become a more feasible reality rather than a distant dream. Specifically, Adelante works to challenge deficit notions about students of color and Latin@ students in particular. Though there are various components to Adelante, I focus specifically on the OHP as I have had the most experience with this aspect of Adelante.

The OHP forms a part of Adelante's goals in promoting cultural enrichment opportunities for students and families. Second- through sixth-grade students at Jackson who are in dual immersion classrooms are asked to participate in projects which explicitly center their voice and experience. The purpose of these projects is to combat traditional schooling curricular methods which emphasize a detachment from the personal and community knowledge students bring. As such, the OHP, along with the Adelante partnership as a whole, are efforts which attempt to disrupt the substandard education that students of color receive on a daily basis. The after school college class builds on these foundations to not only further disrupt traditional schooling but to do so in more explicit ways where concepts such as race and gender are at the forefront of discussion. In the next section, I highlight the theoretical approaches that I used within this research project.

Theoretical Approaches: Intersecting Critical Race Theory With Anzaldúa's Borderlands

This research study was largely informed by the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Anzaldúa's scholarship on borderlands. Though it did

not become a central framework, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) helped shape how I understood and made sense of dominant constructions of youth of color. In this section, my aim is to demonstrate how I utilized these theories as part of my guiding frameworks for this study, and why I felt they were necessary to place in conversation with one another. Thus, I first begin by providing brief descriptions of these frameworks, followed by examining why they were useful to this study. Although there is much that can be written about these frameworks, my goal here is to keep my descriptions succinct, as both Chapters 2 and 3 further expand upon how these frameworks informed the study. I first turn my attention to examining how YPAR helped inform my understanding of youth and specifically, how youth of color are perceived within a U.S. context.

Many critical youth studies scholars engage in YPAR, which is designed to place youth of color and youth voice at the center of research inquiry. Additionally, YPAR focuses on viewing youth of color as agents of social change, rather than as passive receivers who are too young to understand or formulate social critique (Akom et al., 2008; Cammarota & Romero, 2014; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2006). A YPAR framework is both theoretical and methodological and it positions youth of color as having much more agency than they are given credit for. As such, YPAR projects are often focused on allowing youth to decide the issues they feel are most relevant to their lives and communities, and providing a space for them to generate their own solutions to these issues. This research was informed by YPAR and critical youth studies scholars in that I drew from the critical ways that these scholars thought about and engaged with youth of color. In other words, the work of YPAR scholars informed the ways that I critically thought about youth of color and the multiple ways that they enact agency.

The primary reasons why I was interested in utilizing CRT and Anzaldúan frameworks for this study are due to my own schooling, personal, and academic experiences. These frameworks have given me a language with which to understand and name the experiences I had as a student in the public k-12 system in California. Coming from a Mexican immigrant, low-income household, I understood very early on the struggles of Latin@s and Chican@s "trying to make it" in the U.S. My parents, both first generation immigrants from Mexico, always pushed us to go to school and obtain a career that would not leave us cleaning up other peoples' messes, literally. Though these experiences were instructive and make me who I am today, they are also quite painful and the trauma I carry from them still hangs on my shoulders. I have learned a great deal about the world at a great cost. Frameworks such as CRT and Anzaldúa's borderlands have given me a new way of conceptualizing these experiences so I can not only understand them better, but learn to negotiate the historical trauma imprinted on my body (Torres, 2003).

CRT is a framework which forefronts race and racism and acknowledges how it is inherent to the everyday functioning of U.S. society (Bell, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2006). Specifically, it allows me to understand schools as institutions that perpetuate a racist agenda that serves to systematically disadvantage students of color. It allows me to theorize the reasons why unequal schooling conditions persist between students of color and their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Another important aspect of CRT that was useful for this research is the concept of counterspaces. Counterspaces

allowed me to conceptualize the after school Chican@ studies class as a critical space where critical dialogues of self-reflection can occur.

Writing from a position along the border between the U.S. and Mexico, or as a "borderlander," Anzaldúa centers the negotiation of the clash between the "first world" and the "third world," or the multiple identities we embody as marginalized peoples within the U.S. Specifically, Anzaldúa as a queer[16] Chicana from Tejas, infuses Chicana feminist[17] critique into her work, but extends it further by theorizing from a border positionality (Elenes, 2011). In particular, the aspects of Anzaldúa's work that I found particularly helpful for this research were concepts like nos/otras, nepantla, and the path of conocimiento.[18] These concepts helped me think about the way that we need to embrace the multiple positionalities that people embody, rather than separating these identities. Anzaldúa's scholarship also provided me with a language to think about how we understand tensions and conflict amongst one another, particularly in how we relate and connect with each other.

I now turn my attention to highlight why these two theoretical frameworks were useful and important to this research. Anzaldúa's scholarship allows for a discussion of tensions and contradictions in our research and in our everyday lives. A framework like CRT, for example, though it is useful in making sense of how structures perpetuate racism and forms of domination, it often does not address or center the contradictions we experience as people embodying multiple positionalities. Though using CRT was helpful in my conceptualizations of counterspace, I found that Anzaldúa's scholarship was also

[16] I use the word queer to challenge the presumed normalness of heterosexuality as well as to invoke the political and social consciousness that challenges this normality.
[17] A more thorough discussion and engagement of Chicana feminisms can be found in Chapter 2.
[18] These concepts are elaborated on in Chapter 2.

necessary in this conceptualization because it allowed me to think about the development and sustainability of relationships in particular, which are of course integral to counterspaces as a whole. Research, in general, is a contested space filled with tension even when we have the best of intentions (Tuck et al., 2008). Feminist of color frameworks, such as the work of Anzaldúa, help us make sense of the way that we embody multiple contradictions even when our intent is to challenge the status quo. Additionally, feminist of color frameworks inserted into the discussions on critical youth studies, help illuminate the complexities, nuances, and provide us a language with which to reflect on the tensions that we experience as researchers of color. For these reasons, I merged together aspects of CRT and Anzaldúa's scholarship in this research because they both provided me with different tools to examine the permanence of racism, schools as institutions that perpetuate racism, and how young Brown people negotiate their multiple subject positions. In the next section, I discuss the methodology and methods that I used for this research.

Methodology and Methods

This research is methodologically grounded by a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998). A Chicana feminist epistemology provided a language for me to incorporate my positionality as a Chicana, in combination with my personal and professional experiences into this research. It also allowed me to center a Chicana/Latina feminist praxis in working with Latin@ youth.

For this study, I used ethnographic methods (Merriam, 2009) including field notes, participant observation, researcher memos, and document analysis such as, for

example, the students' coursework from the college class. Pláticas (Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Gonzalez, 2001) were also used as both a methodology and method in that pláticas were tied to my Chicana feminist epistemology. Pláticas invoke and welcome culturally specific knowledge via informal conversations that are grounded in a two-way directional approach, meaning that the researcher also shares information in a reciprocal, vulnerable process.

Significance

This research is significant because it provides insight into the process of working alongside and co-constructing a counterspace with Latin@ elementary aged youth. Specifically, this research provides concrete examples of what building a counterspace together looked like, including the tensions that formed a part of this process. This study engages the question of: What does CRT and Anzaldúan praxis look like with young people of color, and specifically, young Brown youth? Thus, this study demonstrates the implications of what it means to engage elementary aged Brown youth in critical, reflective dialogues about themselves, school, and broader society.

In thinking about questions of critical praxis with young people, this research highlights the messiness of what it means for educators to accept and validate young people as they are, to recognize their multiple, embodied knowledges, as well as challenge the way that they reproduce dominant discourses. This study, then, highlights a process of what it means for educators to engage the ongoing development of critical

consciousness (hooks, 2003; 2009) with young people of color. Specifically, hooks (2003) defines critical consciousness as

> …a process by which we reflect from that interrogative standpoint on our awareness of reality. For example, most black people are conscious that we live in a racist and white supremacist society…critical consciousness is at work when we are able to utilize our knowledge of this reality in ways that circumvent racist exploitation and oppression. (p. 70)

In this way, hooks understands critical consciousness as a process by which marginalized peoples recognize and resist their own oppression. Hooks highlights that most Black folks are aware that they live in a White dominated society, and I too argue and highlight in this research that young Brown youth are aware of the multiple ways in which they are oppressed, due to for example, age, gender, skin color, race/ethnic background, and income. What young people of color often lack, particularly in schools, are opportunities to continually engage their own development and processes of critical consciousness. This research, using Anzaldúa's (2002) path of conocimiento, provides one example of how to engage in this journey with young people who are continually in a process of negotiating who they are.

I began this chapter with a vignette that illustrated how I became interested in this research project. I then introduced my research questions, followed by a statement of the problem and how this research addresses that problem. I then outlined the context for this study and briefly described the theoretical frameworks that informed this project. I ended this chapter with a brief description of the methodology and methods, as well as the significance of this research. In Chapter 2, I expand on the theoretical frameworks that guided this study and particularly why they were useful in helping me address the research questions. I highlight how CRT and Anzaldúa informed this study and my

conceptualization of counterspaces. In Chapter 3, I discuss in more detail the methodology that informed this research project and in particular highlighting how a Chicana feminist epistemology grounded this study. I also expand on the methods used in this study.

Chapter 4 addresses both my first and second research questions, and examines specifically the process of what it meant to co-construct a counterspace with Brown youth. Drawing heavily from Anzaldúan thought and pedagogical practice, this chapter examines the nuances and tensions associated with our development of a counterspace. In particular, it addresses the ways that youth negotiate relationships, both peer relationships as well as relationships between myself and them. This chapter offers a new conceptualization of counterspaces based on the findings from this research. Chapter 5 addresses my third research question, and also builds upon on the findings in Chapter 4, but presents these findings in more extensive detail. Specifically, Chapter 5 hones in on the process of relationship development, and the ongoing tensions between the boys and girls in the counterspace. Utilizing Anzaldúa's (2002) path of conocimiento to make sense of the relationships particularly between boys and girls, I argue that the girls utilized the counterspace as a platform to engage in critical conversations about gender discrimination. This chapter illuminates what the process of critical consciousness looked like for young Brown girls who were negotiating their gender identity with their Brown male classmates.

Lastly, Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of this study and also presents theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for critical social justice educators. It also places the research within the context of educational reform for students of color,

but particularly within discussions of ethnic studies based educational approaches. I also incorporate a discussion of the limitations of this research and how the limitations could be addressed in future research projects with elementary aged Brown youth. I end this chapter with students' digital narratives, demonstrating their resiliency in the face of the multiple obstacles they encounter as young people of color.

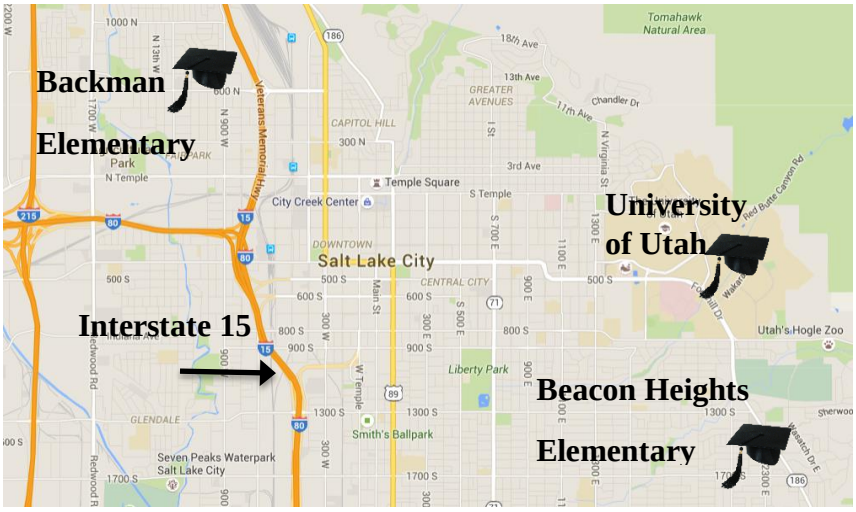

Figure 1. Visual representation of the location of Backman Elementary, Beacon Heights Elementary, Interstate 15, and the University of Utah.

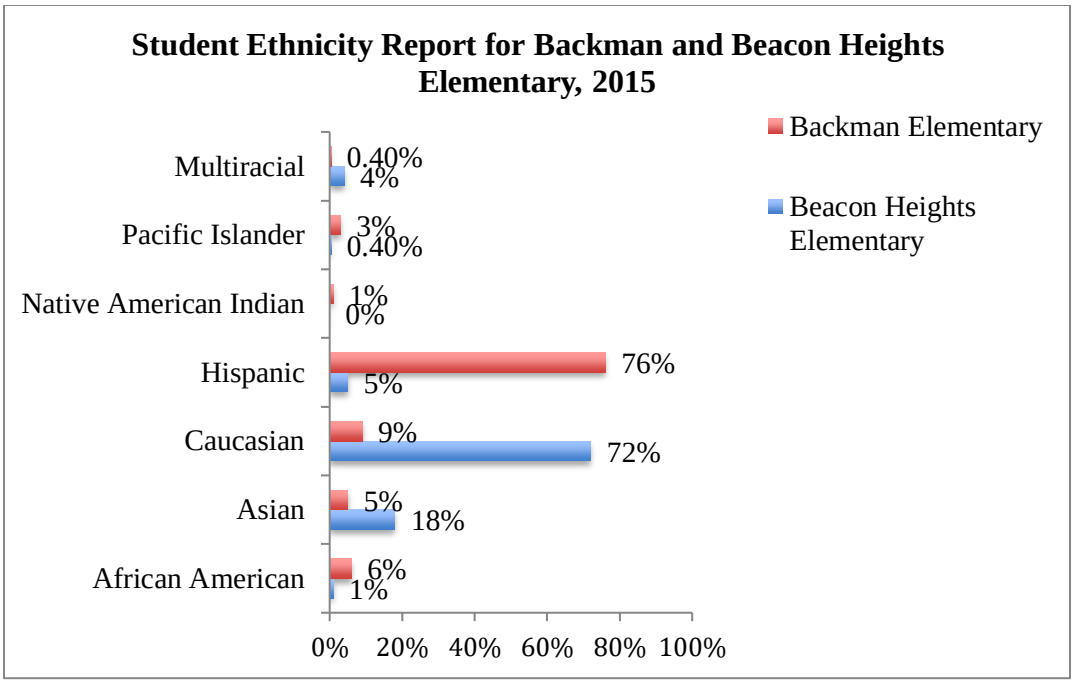

Figure 2. Student ethnicity reports for Backman and Beacon Heights Elementary represented graphically (racial/ethnic categories designated by the district).

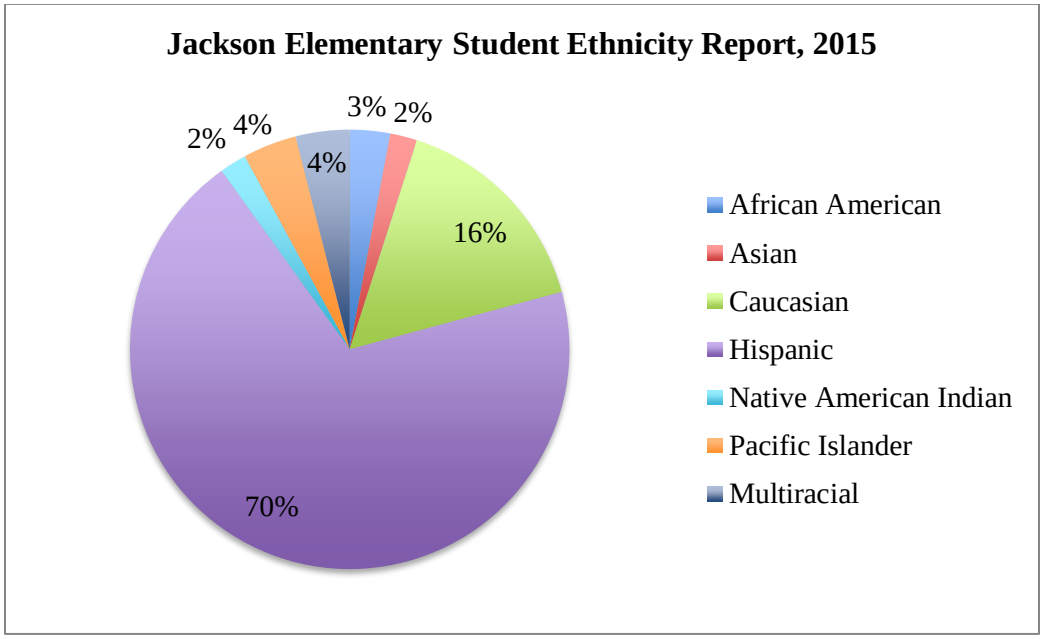

Figure 3. Student ethnicity report for Jackson Elementary represented graphically.

CHAPTER 2

MERGING TOGETHER CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND ANZALDÚAN THOUGHT TO CONCEPTUALIZE COUNTERSPACE PRAXIS

In this chapter, I examine the literatures that inform this research study. Specifically, this chapter is broken into two distinct sections. The first section examines how Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) conceptualizes youth of color in ways that challenge dominant narratives about these youth. I begin this chapter with examining this aspect of YPAR literature particularly because it has shaped and informed my own nondeficit approach to engaging with young people. Although this research project does not employ a YPAR methodology or theoretical framework specifically, YPAR nonetheless has played a role in how I understand young people and the ways they make sense of themselves and their social world. It is for this reason that I include it as the first section of this chapter in order to provide the reader with my understanding and conceptualizations of youth of color.

The second section of this chapter more closely examines the literatures connected to the theoretical frameworks that I used for this study. Specifically, this research drew from aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Anzaldúa's

conceptualization of the borderlands. Both of these theoretical approaches were necessary and guided me in my approach and conceptualizations of the research project. In particular, CRT in education provided me with a critical language with which to understand schools as institutions that perpetuate racism and forms of subordination. In other words, CRT allows me to think about schools as larger structures which function in the service of White supremacy. The concept of racial realism (Bell, 1992) specifically allows me to approach my research in/with schools in a way that recognizes such structures will never change. Additionally, counterspaces as a part of CRT were an important tool for this research. Counterspaces allowed me to think about the importance of space for marginalized communities and the forms of resistance that can happen in such spaces. I utilized Anzaldúa's conceptualization of the borderlands in this research because her scholarship provides a language that allowed me to theorize the importance of relationships and dialogue which are so central to our processes of self and community transformation. Thus, Anzaldúa's borderlands framework is one that examines both the self, and processes of self-transformation, as well as examining our relationships with others, and how we collectively make sense of forms of oppression. In particular, I utilized Anzaldúa's borderlands because in theorizing about the self, she explicitly focuses on the way we make sense of our multiple positionalities and identities. In this way, Anzaldúa provides a language to theorize the tensions, contradictions, and pain we experience with ourselves and with others as both "colonizer/colonized" subjects (Villenas, 1996).

I begin this chapter with discussing how YPAR frames youth of color and the reasons why thinking about youth in this way are useful for my study. I then move to my

theoretical frameworks and discuss the ways that CRT informed the study, specifically with regard to schooling institutions and their investment in upholding Whiteness. Then, I transition into talking about how Anzaldúa informed this research project, and particularly the ways that her focus on relationships and connectedness with others was useful for me in not only doing this research, but furthermore pushing the boundaries of CRT, and counterspaces in particular. Thus, in the sections that ensue, I pay particular attention to the aspects of the frameworks that are useful for this research, rather than providing an exhaustive account of these frameworks in their entirety. Though I provide an overview of the frameworks and how they are discussed within the literature, my intent is to position them for the reader so that they may understand how these frameworks informed my thinking, my approach to the research, as well as my data analysis (which is expanded upon in greater detail in Chapter 3).

As a reminder for the reader, this research project centers the experiences of fifth-grade Latin@ students in their participation in an after school, Chican@ studies college class, what I also name a counterspace. Specifically, I was interested in examining how students engaged with one another and myself within our after school counterspace. Additionally, these frameworks also help me understand my own positionality in connection to the students, as well as how the experiential knowledge I bring to the classroom impacts my approach to the research.

Reframing How We Think About the Capacities of Young People

The social category "youth" carries with it various meanings, but in particular the focus has been on how youth are in a middle space between childhood and adulthood,

and therefore cannot rationalize in the same ways that adults can (Akom, Ginwright, & Cammarota, 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Lesko, 2012). In this way, dominant narratives of youth position them as being vulnerable, yet at the same time dangerous (Lesko, 2012), and needing guidance to protect them from themselves. Additionally, when "youth" is referenced in education literature, it most often refers to high school aged youth, typically between the ages of 13-19 (or the teen years). These teenage years are seen as the time when individuals either make the decision to "be good" and transition into healthy adulthood, or "be bad" and transition to delinquency (Lesko, 2012).

For this section, I specifically examine how dominant narratives of youth of color impact how people think and work with them, as well as the way that critical youth studies and YPAR scholars challenge these dominant narratives. I focus on youth of color because they are positioned in ways that are markedly different from their White counterparts, in that they experience added dimensions of oppression that are based on the intersections of race, class, and gender in particular. Youth of color are more often highly criminalized and sexualized, while at the same time viewed as academically incompetent (Conchas, 2006; Lee, 2005). My aim for this analysis is to highlight how viewing youth of color in more critical ways and as agents of change can inspire different ways of thinking about and in turn different ways of working with them, both within and outside of school settings. Going against traditional psychological development models, which position White, middle class youth as the norm, critical youth studies and YPAR scholars suggest that in order to effectively meet the needs of youth of color, both within

education and through policy practices, we must allow them the space to share their community and familial knowledges (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Historical Constructions of Youth

Many critical youth studies in education scholars cite the ways in which teens and youth are depicted both developmentally, and socially. These depictions are often negative, and as Lesko (2012) writes, "[t]ypically teenagers appear in our cultural talk as synonymous with crazed hormones, as delinquents, deficiencies, or clowns, that is, beings not to be taken too seriously" (p. 1). Thus, the dominant narrative of youth views them as incapable of making important decisions about themselves, as well as their communities. As previously mentioned, youth are viewed in a "transitional" phase, focused more on what they will be as adults, rather than who they currently (present tense) are (Lesko, 2012). This diminishes the importance of viewing them via their current experiences, and places more emphasis on thinking about when they "get older."

Tracing a social/historical construction of "adolescence" or youth, Lesko (2012) writes about the ways that White male youth are positioned in comparison to an "other," meaning youth of color, as well as White females. Thus, viewing adolescence as merely a phase in a linear process of being overly emphasizes Eurocentric ways of knowing and being. In illustrating this point, Lesko (2012) writes,

> I have drawn from other historians' and theorists' work to demonstrate how adolescence and its status as always 'becoming' are interwoven with the cultural and historical emphases on progress defined in limited ways. The value and preoccupation with becoming civilized occurred as the U.S. was establishing an international empire as well as keeping a particular 'civilized' social order at home, which involved keeping white middle-class men dominant. (p. 192)

In this way, Lesko (2012) demonstrates how historical and many present constructions of adolescence are based upon colonial, civilizing principles, even when they are merged with psychological developmental stages, which are heavily Eurocentric in nature. Such ideologies shape education and curricular choices for youth, and particularly youth of color who are considered deviant from the norm. For example, historically, curriculum for boys emphasized their masculinity through organized sport, while curriculum for girls emphasized domesticity and learning skills of the "home" (Lesko, 2012). Such perceptions limit the possibilities of what youth can do through assumptions that they are not only incapable of doing more, but additionally separating their abilities based on ideologies concerning race, class, and gender.

Writing specifically about historical representations of children (considered to be younger than teenagers and preteens), Saavedra and Demas (2002) highlight how these representations are embedded in Western ideologies and patriarchy. They argue that,

> …studies that engage in reconstructing the history and past of the 'child' serve to reify modern patriarchal categories that have been created and imposed on those constructed as children and on those whose lives have been inextricably tied to them—women. (Saavedra & Demas, 2002, p. 80)

Here, Saavedra and Demas highlight how the notion of "child" from a historical perspective has been recreated retrospectively, as opposed to being understood in that moment. Additionally, they further highlight how these retrospective constructions are tied to ways that position both women and children as being subordinate to men, thereby reinforcing patriarchy. Not only do these historical reconstructions have implications for how we make sense of children historically, but additionally how we understand them even in a contemporary context. To challenge these patriarchal notions of children, Saavedra and Demas argue that we need to re-examine the lens that we use to understand

childhood historically, and re-imagine the questions that we seek to understand if we are to create new knowledge and understandings.

In this section, I have given a brief overview of how historical constructions of youth were shaped by and centered a White, middle class, male norm that served to position youth of color as "other." By centering Whiteness and maleness, constructions of youth of color were informed by deficit ideologies that viewed them as deficient, lacking, and in need of reform. In particular, social constructions of Mexican-American youth (and communities) from the late 1800s to the civil rights era (and arguably the present), positioned them as dirty, unable to learn, and unable to speak English (San Miguel, 1999; *Stolen Education,* 2013). These ideologies shaped how Mexican-American youth were viewed and treated in schools, including the school segregation they endured which separated their instruction from White youth (San Miguel, 1999; *Stolen Education,* 2013).

The reason why I highlight some of this history in this section on understanding the social construction of youth is that I believe it speaks to the ways that young people of color are viewed today in society. In particular, they are often viewed as disengaged politically and civically, and are frequently defined by stereotypes that serve to keep them in the underclass. In combating these deficit notions of youth of color, many critical youth studies scholars engage in the work of YPAR to demonstrate how young people are astute and critical consumers of their social realities. In the next section, I highlight the ways that these scholars have engaged with and alongside young people of color, and the connection between their scholarship and my research project.

Critically Engaging Young People: The Work of Critical Youth Studies Scholars

Challenging the ways in which youth of color are limited by deficit perceptions, many critical youth studies in education scholars have turned to Participatory Action Research (PAR)[19] or Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) methods to collaborate in alternative ways with youth of color. Inherent to the framework of PAR and YPAR is critical youth studies which is

> …a field of academic inquiry…that…goes beyond traditional pathological approaches to assert that young people have the ability to analyze their social context, to collectively engage in critical research, and resist repressive state and ideological institutions. (Akom, Ginwright, & Cammarota, 2008, p. 2)

Thus, PAR and YPAR take youth as active agents of resistance against oppression as their frame of reference. In further defining YPAR, Akom, Ginwright, and Cammarota (2008) write, "…YPAR is defined as a research methodology in which young people study their own social contexts to understand how to improve conditions and bring about greater equity" (p. 4). Thus, YPAR and PAR challenge deficit notions of youth of color by allowing them the opportunity to share the wealth of knowledge they possess about their communities, as well as their social position.

Because YPAR and PAR are research methodologies, or approaches to how research is done, there is considerable emphasis that these critical youth studies and YPAR/PAR scholars place on promoting equity between the "researcher" and the

[19] YPAR stems from the broader framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR), with the primary difference being that YPAR focuses on youth and PAR includes both youth and adults as part of the research process. Though I am focusing primarily on YPAR here, I also include PAR because it is the larger framework that YPAR draws from.

"researched." Highlighting this aspect of PAR/YPAR, Akom, Ginwright, and Cammarota (2008) write,

> [a]s a collaborative approach that breaks down the barriers between the researcher and the researched, and values community members as equitable partners in the research enterprise, YPAR also underscores the liberatory principles of agency, equity, and self-determination. (p. 4)

In this way, YPAR and PAR research approaches emphasize collaboration, whereby knowledge is shared and valued, and youth are not viewed as "empty vessels" requiring filling from adults (Freire, 1970). In fact, many PAR and YPAR scholars utilize interdisciplinary approaches to working with youth of color which center their ability to think critically for themselves, including critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2002), ethnic studies (Cammarota, 2011; Cammarota & Romero, 2010), and critical race theory (CRT) (Malagón, 2010; Revilla, 2012). Many theoretical and methodological frameworks that focus on centering "those on the margins" take interdisciplinary approaches to theorizing about "the margins."[20]

Drawing from multiple frameworks, PAR/YPAR unapologetically challenge how youth of color and communities of color are depicted as deficit, and how such scholars work towards meaningful engagement with these communities. Additionally, youth of color are seen as *active* agents who engage in different forms of resistance across multiple levels. In demonstrating this agency, Quijada Cerecer, Cahill, and Bradley (2013) write,

> Operating from a critical youth studies perspective, we make a distinction between the category of youth and the lives of youth. To this end, young people are not passive receivers of information who are solely understood through

[20] In using the term "on the margins," I am referencing the multitude of critical works which have examined how certain social identities place one outside of the dominant norm, such as being female, of color, queer, able-bodied, etc. In other words, anything straying away from the "white male," places one at the margins, and therefore subject to various forms of oppression within a U.S. context.

> socializing discourses that presume to shape them into future citizens. Instead, young people are active participants in defining what it means to be a citizen in today's diverse multicultural society. (p. 217)

Thus, the authors demonstrate how youth of color are not merely acted upon, but rather that they engage in various practices which are both a response to oppression, as well as move beyond reactions, moving into a space of creativity and possibility. Additionally, much PAR work has focused on working with "those on the margins," highlighting how their social locations allow them to understand oppression in ways that are markedly different from the privileged. For example, Cahill, Quijada Cerecer, and Bradley (2010) write,

> PAR creates an opportunity for the production of new knowledge and the development of new theory. PAR starts with 'the understanding that people—especially those who have experienced historic oppression—…hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences and should help shape the questions [and] frame the interpretations [of research].' (Torre & Fine, 2006, p. 458) (p. 408)

Thus, given their varied experiences, youth of color have conceptions and understandings of their multiple realities which can be understood when there is a space to foster this knowledge.

As has been previously discussed, PAR/YPAR serves to not only challenge deficit notions of youth of color as being unable to think critically on their own, but furthermore highlights these youth as being active agents of change. Thus, a unifying theme among many critical youth studies in education scholars is that of resistance, more specifically the different ways that youth of color defy perceptions. Related to notions of resistance is that of a particular social justice focus, or challenge to dominant narratives concerning race, class, gender, and other forms of oppression. In other words, many critical youth studies in education scholars utilize a social justice approach that interrogates the status

quo. In this way, an important component of working with youth of color in critical ways includes interrogating these social patterns, but furthermore moving towards various forms of action and liberation. This includes forms of activism such as protests as well as activist poetry, art, and writing.

Many critical youth studies scholars describe "youth collaboratives" in their scholarly work, and these are the spaces in which youth and adult mentors engage one another in critical dialogues and discussions. For example, the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP) in the Tucson School District is one such developed program that is cohort based, meaning students have sustained contact with one another as well as adult mentors who are social justice educators (Cabrera, Romero, & Rodriguez, 2013; Cammarota, 2011; Cammarota & Romero, 2010; Cammarota & Romero, 2014). The film Precious Knowledge (Cammarota & Romero, 2014) documents the program's premises, practices, and impact on youth, specifically Chican@ youth. For youth of color who are consistently pushed to the margins in educational settings, courses/programs that provide a critical curriculum as well as a collaborative space to discuss life experiences can be integral to shaping forms of critical consciousness (Marrun, 2015). SJEP parallels other courses/programs throughout the nation which work to empower youth of color through questioning of social relations, power, and educational disparities (Marrun, 2015). Unfortunately, due to racist, xenophobic policies that specifically targeted the Chican@ and Mexican@ youth and mentors a part of the SJEP, the program was in essence banned from Tucson and the state of Arizona more broadly speaking (Cammarota & Romero, 2014). In large part, the SJEP and its success was seen as a threat against the codes of Whiteness (Harris, 1993) that dominate both national and Arizona politics in particular.

Relationships and space have been documented as being relevant to the SJEP because without these two components working to mutually inform one another, the SJEP would not have been successful. For example, the SJEP focused not only on critical curriculum but also on fostering relationships between the instructors and students, such that each are seen as contributing members of the classroom community. This is of particular importance to my research as YPAR scholars demonstrate how relationships become key for the development of critical spaces, or as Akom, Ginwright, and Cammarota (2008) write, "youthtopias." In defining youthtopias, Akom, Ginwright, and Cammarota (2008) state,

> We define Youthtopias as traditional and non-traditional educational spaces…where young people depend on one another's skills, perspectives, and experiential knowledge, to generate original, multi-textual, youth-driven cultural products that embody a critique of oppression, a desire for social justice, and ultimately lay the foundation for community empowerment and social change. (p. 3)

Thus, youthtopias become critical spaces where youth can engage one another, similar to the way that many PAR/YPAR scholars discuss the spaces that they create with their students/youth/community. This highlights the importance of a creation of "space" and what it can do to foster critical dialogue.

YPAR scholars do their research in spaces that are both in and outside of schools. In either case, these scholars operate with the understanding that schools have historically not worked for low income, youth of color, and continue to enact policies that lead to inequitable outcomes for these youth compared to their white counterparts (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Rist, 1973). For this reason, part of a YPAR approach to working with young people is to provide them access to rigorous methods of critical inquiry that can aid them in their academic futures. In particular, the skills of

learning to do critical research is an integral component of a YPAR methodology. Thus, students (and youth) are given access to research skills and practice through an explicit curriculum on the process of conducting research, including methodologies and methods as well as gaining experience in presenting research to broad audiences.

For example, Morrell (2006) conducted a summer research seminar at UCLA for local LA high school students who were coming from predominantly low-income communities of color. Their focus of research was on the resource disparities distributed across schools in LA, and in particular how lack of resources for their schools impacts the education of these youth. Similarly, in New York City working with another youth collective, Tuck et al. (2008) collaborated with high school students in order to examine the quality of education for those who were attending NYC's public schools. Conducting several surveys and interviews as part of their research process, these youth of color were responsible for assessing what are some of the reasons why youth are pushed out of high school, as well as their recommendations for improving schooling conditions. Once again through this study, youth were exposed to the analytics of research in a way that not only improved their academic literacy skills, but additionally focused on the issues that are relevant to their communities and experiences.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) document their experiences doing YPAR and critical pedagogy in classroom spaces, but in particular the English high school classroom. Recognizing, as has been previously mentioned, the need to critically engage youth of color who are systematically neglected by schooling institutions, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell argue that effective models of youth engagement rely on how well educators can critically incorporate the lived realities of youth into the classroom. They

further argue that these realities should be incorporated in ways where youth have opportunities to engage in rigorous practices that challenge the dominant narrative about themselves and their communities. Relying on a YPAR model where youth of color research an issue that is specific to their community, propose a solution to this issue, and then reflect on the effectiveness of the solution, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell suggest that critical youth engagement starts when youth are viewed as equal partners in the research and learning process, and are valued for the insight that they bring with them from their homes/communities.

I share the above examples of youth based projects because they demonstrate how a different approach to thinking about youth of color shapes and informs how these youth respond and engage in critical ways. Additionally, youth of color engagement in these projects tends to be much higher than for youth who are not involved in (or are not given the opportunity to involve themselves in) culturally responsive curriculum projects. For example, the Chican@ youth who participated in the SJEP improved their grades and academics, were more engaged in the SJEP than their regular classes, and also applied to and attended college in higher rates than their counterparts who did not participate in SJEP (Cammarota & Romero, 2014). Thus, these youth projects are able to demonstrate academic improvement and engagement, even in traditional methods of measuring student educational outcomes and success.

Although YPAR provided me with insights into how I wanted to approach my own research with elementary aged Brown youth, there were two limitations I gathered from the literature that I felt would impact my research project, which are: 1) there are virtually no studies where YPAR is applied to a context involving elementary aged youth

of color and 2) few YPAR studies explicitly centered a feminist of color lens. In particular, the first limitation informed my decision to not employ YPAR methodologies as a part of this research project because there were limited options available to me about what this would look like in practice with elementary aged Latin@ youth. Although the YPAR studies cited in this chapter were useful to how I understood the process of working with Latin@ youth, I did not specifically use YPAR because I wanted to leave myself open to engaging with the youth in various ways, rather than tie myself down to the particular components of YPAR. This is not to say that I could not have used YPAR in this research or that it is not a useful framework that others can use in similar research projects, but rather I made the choice to not limit myself to doing "only YPAR" because I suspected (based on my experiences working with the youth) that the research process would not neatly fit into a YPAR approach.

The second limitation, and perhaps the more crucial one, is that a limited number of studies using YPAR foregrounded a feminist of color lens or approach. For this reason, a growing number of feminist scholars have incorporated a feminist of color lens to their work when doing YPAR and PAR (Ayala, 2009; Quijada Cerecer, Cahill, & Bradley, 2011; Torre, 2008; Torre & Ayala, 2009). These scholars are working towards pushing the boundaries of YPAR by examining the contradictions and messiness of researching with young people of color, in more explicit detail. Often, in critical youth based projects, there is a sense of a linear progression that youth go through as they develop their levels of critical consciousness (Tuck & Yang, 2011). However, as Tuck and Yang (2011) argue, processes of consciousness, particularly as it pertains to the lives of young people, are not necessarily linear and in many cases, youth are often severely limited by their

material realities in effecting particular types of social change (Tuck et al., 2008). These scholars are not suggesting that youth do not have agency, but rather that despite our best attempts to engage youth in developing their processes of critical consciousness, we often do not have tangible solutions for the very real and pressing issues they face related to poverty, violence, immigration status, and abuse (Tuck et al., 2008). As I will explore later in greater detail in this chapter, I incorporated an Anzaldúan framework into my research project because it provided me with a language to make sense of the tensions that arose in working closely and researching with elementary aged Latin@ youth. In highlighting this particular point, later I will more closely examine how some feminist scholars have used an Anzaldúan framework in their conceptualization of theorizing tensions within YPAR collectives and spaces.

I have presented the reader with an array of critical youth studies research on what it means to critically engage and work with young people of color. The reason why I have chosen to share aspects of YPAR literature is to illustrate how a YPAR framework helped inform my own approach to researching alongside elementary aged Brown youth. Specifically, what was most useful for my research with regard to a YPAR framework is how youth of color are critically positioned. Much of the YPAR and PAR literature that I have shared focuses on challenging the traditional relationship between researcher and researched, positioning them as equal parts. YPAR scholars argue that in effectively working with young people of color, they must be viewed as equal partners in the research process, who are able to contribute using their knowledge from their home/community. In this way, young people are viewed as being intellectually capable of possessing skills that allow them to be critical consumers of the world around them.

YPAR informed my approach to working with young people in that I too viewed them as being capable of having an awareness and understanding of the meaning of their marginalized positionalities in relationship to broader society. Although as I have mentioned, I did not specifically utilize a YPAR methodology, I acknowledge that the research done by critical youth studies scholars influenced my own thinking with regard to this research project.

As I have described above, one of the limitations of the YPAR literature is that few if any studies, focus on elementary school aged youth. My research project adds to the literature on critical youth studies by providing one approach to working with elementary aged Latin@ youth, particularly because elementary aged youth are often thought as being "too young" to understand what is happening around them. In this way, my research aims to challenge the notion that elementary aged youth of color are lacking in development such that they are largely unaware of their social realities (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

YPAR scholarship, particularly that which focuses on youth of color, was a helpful tool for me throughout this research project. Though my study was not designed the same way as other YPAR studies, in that the youth whom I worked with were not conducting their own research based projects, I nonetheless engaged them in ways that were similar to the approach taken by YPAR scholars. YPAR studies with youth of color have offered me examples of the possibilities that exist when we work to break down the barriers between who can create knowledge and who cannot. In particular, how relationships happen and function in YPAR studies was of importance to me given that these relationships are key to creating "youthtopias" or other such critical spaces.

Now that I have outlined how a YPAR approach informed this study, I will turn my focus to conceptualizing how the theoretical frameworks that I have chosen, CRT and Anzaldúa's borderlands, are useful in addressing the research questions. I begin first by examining CRT, which I utilize as a framework that helped me understand how schooling institutions engage in and reproduce hierarches related to race, class, and other forms of oppression. After discussing how I employ CRT in this research, I move to describing how Anzaldúa's theorization of the borderlands was particularly helpful for this research in aiding me to make sense of the tensions that we experience as a result of our multiple, marginal positionalities. In essence, CRT allowed me to take a more "macro" approach to understanding this research, via schools as institutions that uphold Whiteness, while an Anzaldúan framework allowed me to focus on the "micro" parts of this research, specifically how I made sense of and theorized relationships and contradictions.

Theoretical Frameworks

CRT and Schools as Sites of Racial Realism

Given that my research took place in a public school setting, it is important for me to acknowledge the real and material conditions which shape schools and the experiences of students of color, including how forms of oppression are taught and validated through schools. It is for this reason that I employed a CRT in education framework for my research in order to examine and understand how schools function to maintain whiteness at the expense of the academic success of students of color. Thus, in this section I will demonstrate how my research was informed by a racial realist approach to working in a school, as well as the way that CRT allowed me to think about structures, schools being

one of them, and the impact they have on marginalized communities. An especially important concept to this research project is the notion of counterspace, derived from CRT literature. Specifically, I utilized counterspace in this research to better understand one approach to developing and constructing a critical space with elementary aged Latin@ youth.

A CRT in education framework provided a language for me to discuss the multiple and purposeful schooling practices which are designed to privilege Whiteness in schools. Unequal school funding and resource allocation, academic and "ability" tracking, deficit thinking about students, parents, and communities are all ways in which schools function to maintain whiteness (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Vaught, 2011; Yosso, 2006). Specifically, schools as institutions designed to maintain whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), work in ways that substantially disadvantage students of color. One of the major tenets of a CRT framework is that "racism is endemic in US society," in other words, that racism pervades our everyday lives in ways which are both blatant as well as masked (Bell, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2006). In stating this point, Alemán, Delgado Bernal, and Mendoza (2013) write, "Critical race theorists argue that racism and White privilege dominate and permeate institutions and systems, social norms, and daily practice" (p. 8). In this way, racism and other forms of oppression are inherent in the way that institutions, and in particular schools, run. There are numerous examples of evidence which support this point such as the high numbers of students of color who are pushed out of school, the low numbers of students of color who graduate high school and matriculate into college and Eurocentric

curricular and pedagogical practices which serve to exclude students of color in the classroom (Alemán, Delgado Bernal, & Mendoza, 2013). Thus, CRT is helpful for me in "[u]nderstanding the way schools work—or don't work—for students of color" by "…providing the tools and language to critique and push back against racist structures, policies, and discourses" (Alemán, Delgado Bernal, & Mendoza, 2013, p. 2).

The notion of racial realism (Bell, 1992) aided this research because it allowed me to understand the "realness" of schools as structures that are not only slow to change but in fact are not designed to *ever* change for the betterment of students of color. CRT scholar Derrick Bell understood this concept when he witnessed the setbacks of the Civil Rights movement and civil rights gains that had been made during this time (Bell, 1992). White privilege can be understood metaphorically through the Greek mythological creature of the *hydra,* a water serpent with nine heads, which if cut, would grow back as double. Similarly, White privilege suffers various cuts, bruises, and amputations which then lends to a reshaping of itself in new ways to maintain its superiority. This idea is at the core of racial realism, in that Bell suggests that racial oppression and subordination, though it takes different shapes and forms, will never cease to exist.

In stating how he defines racial realism, Bell (1992) writes,

> Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary 'peaks of progress,' short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it and move on. (p. 5)

Thus, racial realism acknowledges and understands that racial equality is not a realistic goal, mostly in part because it has never been historically nor contemporarily true. The roots of racism and colonialism run so deep, Bell argues, that racial equality will simply

never exist. However, Bell is by no means suggesting that the fight towards racial injustice, or resistance, is futile. In fact, racial realism is as much about understanding our legacy of resistance as it is about acknowledging our legacy of oppression.

In my experiences working with elementary aged youth of color in the classroom via my role as an oral history co-coordinator, I understood that certain topics, especially ones connected to race or racism, or other forms of oppression, were difficult to address openly in classrooms where teachers themselves did not feel they were adequately prepared to dialogue with their students about them. In the 3 years prior to when this research project took place (which was the 2014-2015 academic school year), I witnessed teachers express both nonverbal and verbal discomfort when students talked about the oppression they experienced, for example, a family member getting deported. There was one particular instance when a third-grader working on their oral history picture story project talked about how he "hated" the U.S. because his family could never travel or go anywhere because they did not have drivers' licenses. This information was part of what this third-grader wanted to share about himself via his project. His teacher then told him that he could not say that he "hated the U.S.," and instead convinced him that his project should focus on the positive aspects of being in this country, rather than the negative ones. In this instance, the teacher was uncomfortable with addressing how or why this student felt the way that he did while living in the U.S. Rather than address the personal information he was sharing, she instead strongly suggested that he change that information to reflect another part of his life that was more positive. In his final project, this student removed the information about hating the U.S. altogether and instead wrote about how he liked Halloween because he would get candy.

I share this example because it illustrates how the third-grade teacher in this case was uncomfortable with the notion that a student of hers could actually "hate" living in the U.S. Although his reasons for expressing himself were valid, his teacher failed to recognize how they were in fact valid and instead changed the direction of his project entirely. I view this as a missed opportunity, where the teacher could have critically engaged the student by encouraging him to infuse into his project an understanding of why it was that his family had to live in constant fear. She could have had him turn his project into a discussion of how the current state of immigration policies in the U.S. leaves little options for those who come to the U.S. undocumented and in search of a better life. Instead, what ended up happening was that this student was made to feel embarrassed for sharing what he did and was viewed as not doing the project "correctly."

Instances such as the one that I detail above were not uncommon in the classrooms that I worked with. In seeing how teachers often failed to address the material realities of students and recognize the forms of critical knowledge they brought with them into the classroom, I sought to co-develop a space where students would be able to share this type of knowledge more openly. In being familiar with CRT literature, I understood counterspaces as one approach that I could take in co-developing a critical space with young people. This was how my primary ideas related to this research project and the research questions came about. The notion of racial realism also played a role in my desire to develop a counterspace because I understood how the conditions of schooling would continue to stifle the types of knowledges from the margins that students were sharing and expressing. Rather than tackle the way that teachers *are not* trained to be culturally competent, critical educators (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2000; 2009b), I

instead focused my energy on co-developing a space with Latin@ youth where I could have more direct influence over the critical topics that students were sharing.

In wanting to learn how I could co-develop a counterspace for the purposes of this research, I began to more thoroughly examine the literature related to critical race counterspaces. In doing so, I found that there was a significant gap with regards to how they were being defined and conceptualized in explicit terms. So while it seemed that scholars were using the notion of counterspaces in their research, few of them were going out of their way to explicitly define what this exactly means. The next section reflects the CRT literature related to counterspaces. I particularly highlight how many scholars use one specific definition of counterspaces, but have not worked towards theorizing counterspaces in more detail. I also illustrate how counterspaces were an important part of this research project.

Fostering Critical Counterspaces

Counterspaces within CRT literature have often been broadly cited as "…sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged" (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 70). Much of the literature that I have found within CRT in education that more concretely defines counterspaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Grier-Reed, 2010; Nuñez, 2011; Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, & Howard, 2013; Yosso, 2006) cite the aforementioned Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso article. Thus, in broad terms, counterspaces can be understood as places where communities of color come together to challenge deficit notions about their communities. In my review of the CRT literature related to counterspaces, nearly all of the research focuses on how counterspaces operate *within*

schools in particular. This is not to suggest of course that counterspaces do not or cannot happen outside of schools, because certainly they do. However, the fact that several scholars have written about counterspaces happening within school spaces speaks to the very principles that form the basis of a CRT in education framework, primarily that schools operate to maintain and uphold codes of Whiteness (Harris, 1993). In this way, counterspaces within schools function to *counter* policies and practices of schools (and also broader society) that can serve to disadvantage students of color and other marginalized students.

In this section, I examine some of the literature related to critical race counterspaces and specifically how scholars talk about counterspaces within schools. I also include studies from scholars who do not necessarily use the word "counterspace" to describe their research. However, I highlight how their work has implications for my own understanding of counterspaces and how I applied them to this research project. To a lesser degree, I also examine some of the CRT literature related to counterstories. Counterstories can function as a methodological tool that can be used to validate the experiences of people of color while simultaneously speaking back to forms of power (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). For the purposes of my research, I do not use counterstories methodologically. However, I incorporate them as a part of the literature on counterspaces because these two concepts are related, but not necessarily always intertwined. Thus, I use counterstories to provide the reader with more context and understanding of counterspaces, while simultaneously acknowledging that counterstories were not explicitly a part of my methodological approach.

As mentioned at the outset of this section, counterspaces can be understood as spaces where communities of color challenge deficit notions about their communities. Implicit throughout the CRT literature on counterspaces is that they are important sites for developing critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2003), community (Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, 2006) and engaging in forms of resistance. Because of this, I argue that counterspaces are both curricular and pedagogical in nature. Specifically, what I mean by curricular is that counterspaces center critical discourse. In other words, the "curriculum" within counterspaces is always of a critical nature, in that it works to challenge forms of domination. I do not mean to say here that counterspaces operate with a set curriculum or approach, but rather I use "curriculum" as a way of describing the types of discussions that occur within counterspaces. Though implicit, this particular point is obvious in that again, counterspaces challenge deficit notions of people of color by definition. I further argue that counterspaces are pedagogical in nature because in centering critical discourse, people within counterspaces are teaching one another. I have mentioned previously how a part of counterspaces involves developing critical consciousness. In this way, counterspaces are also pedagogical spaces where participants learn about the experiences of others related to domination, and teach about their own.

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) discuss the formation of counterspaces as an act of resistance and community building against the negative impact of racial microaggressions. Specifically, their study examined the experiences of African American college students on a predominantly White campus and the various racial microaggressions they encountered. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso define racial microaggressions as "unconscious or subtle forms of racism" (p. 60) that are cumulative,

or happen over time. The authors point to the overall negative campus racial climate that African American students had to endure as a result of the various forms of White supremacy that prevailed on their campus. The codes of Whiteness embedded throughout the different facets of campus life for these students led them to experience racial microaggressions that targeted their intellectual capability and their ability to be academically successful. Experiencing racial microaggressions from people like their peers as well as their professors, the African American students in this study found it necessary to form counterspaces, both on and off campus, where they could share their experiences with one another.

In recognizing how the African American students in their study needed a space where they could share the negative experiences they were having on campus, the authors identified both academic and social counterspaces as a part of the resistance strategies of these students. Specifically, they define academic counterspaces as spaces which,

> …allow African American [and by extension students of color] students to foster their own learning and to nurture a supportive environment wherein their experiences are validated and viewed as important knowledge. (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 70)

Social counterspaces are defined as "…a space, outside of the classroom confines, [which allows for] the venting of frustrations and to get to know others who share [your] experiences of microaggressions and/or overt discrimination" (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p.70). Combined, these two forms of counterspaces proved vital to the academic success of these students on a campus where they did not feel sufficiently supported. Thus, the students in this study needed a counterspace where they could *counter* the types of discrimination they were experiencing on campus, and in particular, the racial microaggressions they heard on a daily basis. In sharing their narratives with one another

in their counterspaces, the students were able to develop and build community in ways where they could have their experiences validated.

Conducting research in a similar vein, Grier-Reed (2010) highlights in her study how the African American Student Network (AASN) at a predominantly White institution of higher education served as a counterspace for African American students who underwent consistent forms of stress related to racial discrimination. In particular, Grier-Reed points to the importance of relationships and relationship development within the African American Student Network as being the primary reasons why students considered the network to be a sanctuary, a term that she uses interchangeably with the word counterspace. She argues that the AASN was important for Black students on campus because it provided them a space where they could share experiences with one another and cope with the daily realities of racism, in particular the ones they encountered on campus. In her study, the AASN proved to be vital to the academic success of Black students who were dealing with racism at an institution of higher education, again demonstrating how counterspaces are important to the survival mechanisms of students of color within schooling institutions that uphold values tied to Whiteness.

Similarly, Nuñez (2011) examined the experiences of first-generation college Latino students at a 4-year institution and how Chicano studies courses aided them in dealing with feelings of isolation on campus. She highlights how taking Chicano studies classes for these students allowed them to connect with others on campus who not only looked like them, but additionally, provided them with a space to challenge the deficit notions that people had about them both on campus and in broader society. In this way,

Nuñez argues that the Chicano studies courses themselves were the counterspaces that Latino students needed on campus to successfully navigate their education.

Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, and Howard (2013) discuss in their research a counterspace they specifically developed for Black male high school youth in two different Los Angeles high schools. Specifically, Terry et al. argue that the creation of a counterspace designed for Black male youth was imperative to addressing the negative impact that urban school settings were having on these youth and their academic futures. Drawing from previous studies on counterspaces and in particular highlighting the Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) article, Terry et al. named three interrelated parts to the counterspace they developed: 1) academic focus, 2) debriefing racism, and 3) co-constructed nature. In naming these three components as being a part of their counterspace, the authors in essence captured what other scholars were writing about counterspaces, but they were able to define them in more concrete terms. Combining the above three elements, the authors argue that counterspaces are places where: 1) People of color can have their experiential knowledge validated and supported and 2) people of color build community via their ability to share similar experiences related to discrimination.

In the research studies that I have thus far presented, counterspaces have been used similarly, even though they have not necessarily been defined in explicit terms. Relying primarily on the Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) article, these scholars have taken their understanding of counterspaces from the broad definition that Solorzano et al. provide, meaning places where people of color challenge deficit notions about their communities. The common thread that these research studies all share is that they argue

that counterspaces are important to the coping, survival, and resistance of students of color within educational institutions that serve to relegate them to the margins. The fact that the bulk of the research on critical race counterspaces has centered on examining how they are developed *within* educational institutions speaks to their necessity as the spaces where people of color actively resist their oppressive conditions. In the examples of the research that I provided above, a majority of the studies examined the development of counterspaces for students of color on predominantly white campuses. Terry et al. similarly argued that a counterspace for Black male youth was necessary given the failing schools that the youth in their study were attending, leaving them with few post-secondary options. Recognizing that students of color needed spaces where they could collectively cope with and combat forms of discrimination such as racism, these scholars argue that counterspaces are one viable avenue for these students.

Related to the notion that counterspaces are spaces where people of color share and validate one another's experiences, particularly the experiences that are connected to discrimination, I argue that the concepts of counterspaces and counterstories can sometimes, but not always, mutually inform and shape one another. One example that I illustrate in detail that exemplifies this is found in Yosso's (2006) book on the Chican@ educational pipeline. Yosso's book is outlined as a series of composite counterstories,[21] compiled from multiple forms of data, but told in narrative format. Detailing forms of racism for Chican@s along the educational pipeline, Yosso (2006) utilizes these

[21] Composite *counterstories* are defined as stories that "draw on various forms of 'data' to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color. Such counterstories may offer both biographical and autobiographical analyses because the authors create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33).

counterstories to demonstrate how a racial hierarchy operates educationally for Latin@ and Chican@ students.

Briefly, counterstories are positioned in relationship to majoritarian stories, which are "master narratives" that are told in order to uphold and justify a legacy of racism and White supremacy in the U.S. (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In stating this point, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) write, "[w]e…assert that the ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a 'master narrative' in storytelling" (p. 27). These narratives are often seen as and interpreted as "truths" rather than "master narratives" which are used to continually colonize people of color socially and psychologically. Counterstories, then, are utilized to counter the "embedded truth" in these "master narratives" in order to serve as a "…tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32).

The particular example that I highlight from Yosso's book is one that I argue demonstrates how counterspaces and counterstories can sometimes be connected, that is, occurring within the same space. Specifically, when talking about how Latina/Chicana parents (mothers) fight for their children's education at the elementary level, Yosso utilizes a counterstory to introduce a group named *"Madres por la educacion."*[22] This group began with a number of concerned mothers who wanted to demand more from their children's school to better their children's educational future. Throughout her chapter on parental engagement and resistance at the elementary level, there is an implied understanding that this parent group, *Las Madres,* is a counterspace because of the types of discussions and relationships that are present. In this chapter specifically, the parents

[22] Mothers for education

engage in several dialogues about the banking method of education, juxtaposing this with the problem-posing method or approach (Freire, 1970). They also have similar critical discussions about various forms of parental involvement in schools that go unrecognized because they do not fit the form of White parental engagement. Thus, through the telling of the counterstory of how parents speak back to dominant narratives in school and organize to better their children's education, Yosso is also telling us about a specific type of space that is required for this to happen, in other words a counterspace which facilitates these critical dialogues. If the mothers had not been able to share their racialized experiences with one another in a space where they could critically examine their experiences in relationship to the schooling practices that impacted their children, I argue that their organizing efforts would not have been as effective, or perhaps even present.

There are several examples within the CRT literature, including the studies that I previously highlighted above in extensive detail, of counterspaces such as *Las Madres* that provide the physical and relational space for marginalized peoples to "come together" and share narratives of pain, hardship, and struggle. In sharing narratives related to pain and hardship, it is necessary for people to feel that their narratives will be validated (Grier-Reed, 2010). Part of the strength of counterspaces that several scholars highlight is that they can serve as sites where marginalized groups come together to foster and build community with one another, in the midst of environments that work against severing those types of bonds (Bell, 1992). This is why I previously highlighted how counterspaces within the CRT literature have been described as developing *within* schooling institutions, even though they arguably can develop outside of institutions. In

the example of *Las Madres,* Yosso argues that not only were the mothers actively engaged in the education of their children (countering deficit notions about Latin@ parents not caring about education), but she also demonstrates the strength of the mothers as a collective group. In this way, the counterspace that the mothers formed provided a platform for them to not only share their experiences with one another, but to also collectively organize as a means of improving the educational conditions of their children.

An aspect of critical race counterspaces that seems crucially important, yet remains undertheorized, is that of how relationships are developed and sustained within counterspaces. I have discussed extensively how counterspaces provide a space where marginalized peoples can share narratives of discrimination and engage in forms of resistance. Yet in large part, I argue that the primary key to understanding counterspaces lies in our ability to make sense of the relationships that occur within them. For example, Grier-Reed (2010) writes about the "two fundamental humanistic principles" (p. 183) that underlie the African American Student Network which she argues was a counterspace for Black students on campus in her study. She cites these two principles as being, "…attending to the whole person and developing solid relationships that are grounded in empathy and an understanding of one's subjective experience" (Grier-Reed, 2010, p. 183). Thus, Grier-Reed argues that a necessary component and perhaps the most important component of the African American Student Network was the way that relationships were developed such that "one's subjective experience" was valued. Though this sentiment is also implied in the research that other scholars have done on counterspaces, it is not clear how these types of relationships (e.g., ones that center the

whole person or value a person's experience) are sustained. In particular, I argue that what is missing from the literature thus far is an explicit discussion on how we make sense of the relationships within counterspaces, including the tensions that we may experience in their development. I elaborate on this particular point in both Chapters 4 and 5, and I argue that my research project makes a significant contribution in this area of counterspace literature.

Our positionalities inform the relationships we have with one another, particularly in spaces like counterspaces where individuals can make themselves vulnerable, oftentimes painfully so. At the same time that counterspaces can serve as sites of resistance, they are also sites of contradiction and tension, even exclusion, despite the fact that CRT literature often does not recognize this or theorize about it enough. A number of CRT scholars are pushing and extending CRT further by acknowledging that CRT does not sufficiently theorize about the ways in which our (individual and collective) positionalities collide, as well as how we make sense of the contradictions we experience because of these collisions (Alemán, Delgado Bernal, & Mendoza, 2013; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Revilla, 2004).

For example, Revilla (2004) combines tenets of CRT with Chicana/Latina queer feminisms to inject a more Chicana feminist queer lens into the framework of CRT. Bringing these frameworks together allowed Revilla (2004) to not only highlight race as a form of oppression, but additionally oppression based on the intersections of sexuality, gender, and race. Working with a student activist organization at UCLA named Raza Womyn, Revilla developed several "tenets" or aspects of a muxerista pedagogy as she witnessed Raza Womyn work through tensions (in particular how queer Chicanas/Latinas

were often made to feel excluded even within a critical space of Brown women), as well as how they enacted feminist pedagogies. Although Revilla used grounded theory, she adopted CRT and LatCrit[23] frameworks as well as Chicana/Latina feminisms to develop her conception of a muxerista pedagogy. For example, her first tenet states that a muxerista pedagogy, "is committed to challenging all types of oppression in Chicana/Latina/o communities, including but not limited to racism, imperialism, patriarchy, heterosexism, homophobia, nativism, and monolingualism" (Revilla, 2004, p. 83). Similar to CRT's first tenet of a challenge to dominant ideology (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), Revilla builds upon this to be more explicit, centering not just racism, but multiple forms of oppression. Invoking a strong Chicana feminist perspective that CRT often does not do, Revilla (2004) writes that muxerista pedagogy, "[r]edefines, reconstructs, and re-empowers ideological constructs historically used to oppress women" (p. 83).

In another article by Flores and Garcia (2009), the importance of creating a counterspace for women of color who are marginalized at a predominantly White institution as well as the tensions within that space are theorized. Though not explicitly naming it as a counterspace, the authors discuss this group designed for women of color in a similar vein to how counterspaces are broadly defined—as a critical space where women of color can come together to share experiences of pain and oppression, as well as their multiple ways of resisting oppression. In reflecting upon their participation within this counterspace, the authors write,

[23] Latina/o Critical Race Theory, or LatCrit, is a theoretical framework that falls under the umbrella of CRT. In particular, LatCrit focuses on the forms of racialization that are specific to a Latin@ positionality, including one's surname, accent, and immigration status (Yosso, 2006).

> Safe spaces ought to be places of growth, but hardly ever do we hear of the internal struggles and tensions that must be worked out in order to provide and maintain a 'safe space'. And so, lately [we are] torn, [we are] sad, and [we are] wondering why there is so much pain among *mujeres* Latinas—among LTT [the name of the women's group]. (Flores & Garcia, 2009, p. 161)

In this quote, the authors draw upon feminista thought to communicate how we oftentimes have an expectation of what a "safe space" or a counterspace is that often neglects the tensions that must be negotiated in order to maintain those spaces. Additionally, when we bring our multiple positionalities into these spaces, we must contend with how we relate and connect with one another based on our assumptions about the meanings of those positionalities. Specifically, Flores and Garcia (2009) discuss the tensions they experienced within LTT (the name of their counterspace) as Chicanas/Latinas in the group contended with notions of authenticity, or what makes a "true" Chicana/Latina. Recognizing that positionalities are in fact fluid and informed by multiple experiences that are both contextual and regional, Flores and Garcia (2009) write,

> LatCrit, Critical Race Feminism, and US Third World feminism challenge us to take into account multiple nationalities, ethnicities, race, sexual orientation, and immigration background among other identities, in order to become inclusive of experiences in a Latina space. There is a need to break free from the essentialized Latina that we have formulated to measure authenticity and belonging. (p. 169)

Counterpaces then can be great sites of contention to the point where people who initially wanted to be in the space may decide later that they want to leave it. These are the realities and tensions of what happens when we engage in critical dialogue and CRT needs to be expanded further in order to take these realities into account.

In this section of Chapter 2, I have given several in depth examples of the way that counterspaces have been conceptualized within CRT literature. A majority of these

studies focused on the development of counterspaces within educational institutions. I highlighted the importance of this as being connected to the notion that a CRT framework in education helps illuminate the reasons why educational disparities are so large between students of color and White students. I then included a brief discussion of the connections that I draw between counterspaces and counterstories. Though they are not always necessarily intertwined, I argue that counterspaces and counterstories can be connected in that for both of these concepts, challenging dominant narratives and discourse is central. The example that I shared of *Las Madres* was one where I argued that counterspaces and counterstories were occurring within the same space. Lastly, within my review of the CRT literature on counterspaces, I argued that despite the fact that relationships within counterspaces are important, they have thus far been undertheorized. In particular, I demonstrated how Chicana and Latina feminist scholars utilized Chicana/Latina feminist frameworks to theorize the tensions we experience in developing and sustaining relationships. In this way, I argue that utilizing feminist of color frameworks within the CRT counterspace literature, can aid us in making sense of how relationships are negotiated within these spaces.

My goal in sharing the literature that I have shared thus far with regard to critical race counterspaces was to provide the reader with a context for understanding why my own research project made counterspaces so central. Given the years of classroom experiences that I had in working with Latin@ youth during my research assistantship with the Adelante Partnership, my desire to co-develop a counterspace with elementary aged Brown youth stemmed from what I was witnessing in classrooms. Recognizing that teachers, even teachers of color, struggled with knowing how to critically discuss topics

such as race with their students, I wanted to use the skills that I had developed both as a researcher, as well as a Chicana navigating higher education, to facilitate dialogues with Latin@ youth about their lived realities and experiences in a way that would be validating. Additionally, the racial realist (Bell, 1992) approach that I took for this research acknowledged that although school was not necessarily always a negative experience for these youth, it has served to nonetheless teach them the codes of Whiteness and success (Paris & Alim, 2014). It has also worked to invalidate the knowledge they bring from home. Thus, my aim in co-developing a counterspace for Latin@ and Chican@ elementary youth was connected to the idea that these students would have an opportunity within this space to critically engage and reflect with one another about aspects of their lives that were often omitted from school (such as the example that I shared about the third-grade student and his family's undocumented status). I also sought to develop a counterspace with Latin@ youth where they would be able to (and would be asked to) speak openly about their lived experiences. In particular, the idea of having youth speak was important to me because I had been told repeatedly by students throughout my time working with them that they were allowed few opportunities to actually speak and be heard. They felt this way particularly in school, but also even at home when parents and family members made them feel as if their opinions were sometimes not valid. Thus, a major component of the counterspace that we developed for this research was based on dialogue.

Though I recognize how counterspaces can be sites of transformation and community building, I also acknowledge and argue that such spaces can be filled with tensions that can in turn function to drive people away. As I demonstrated previously

through the Revilla (2004) and Flores and Garcia (2009) pieces, what we often assume to be "safe spaces" are frequently not. It is for these reasons that I chose to infuse a Chicana feminist praxis to the concept of counterspaces in my research, because I argue that a feminist of color lens can robustly account for the tensions we feel even when we are in spaces with others who "look like us."

In summary, for the purposes of my own research I understood CRT to be useful to me because of the language that it gave me to understand how schooling institutions uphold Whiteness, as well as its racial realist approach to CRT praxis in schools. I additionally utilized counterspaces as an integral part of my research because I felt a counterspace would be useful to the way that I wanted to critically dialogue with Latin@ youth about their lived experiences and positionalities. However, the limitation to my use of CRT exclusively as a theoretical framework for my research lies in CRT's under-theorization of the importance and role of relationships specifically within counterspaces. Though CRT recognizes how racialized identities play a role within counterspaces, it does not sufficiently theorize how nor what it means when our competing positionalities are at work. This is in large part one reason why I incorporated Anzaldúa into my research, because concepts like nos/otras and nepantla helped me extend my conceptualization of counterspaces by theorizing about the tensions inherent in these spaces. Thus, the following section examines how an Anzaldúan framework is important to this study, and more specifically how it deepened my theorization of counterspaces.

Anzaldúa: Border Spaces, Internal Spaces, and Sites of Transformation

In this section, I examine how Anzaldúa is able to further extend CRT counterspaces by recognizing the messiness of relationships, positionalities, and spaces. Although both CRT and YPAR recognize that nonhierarchical relationships are important when working with youth and communities of color (breaking down the dichotomy between the researcher and researched), how these relationships develop remains under-theorized. Anzaldúan scholarship provided me a more robust understanding of the connection between relationships and positionalities and how they create messy spaces filled with contradiction, pain, and tension. At the same time these spaces can be filled with pain, they are also filled with the potential for transformation. Additionally, Anzaldúa allowed me to theorize about the multiple, complex, and hybrid identities that Latin@ students embody, which was a part of what this research project examined.

Through an Anzaldúan framework, relationships are theorized both with regard to the self and collective, recognizing that one does not function without the other. In other words, you cannot examine yourself individually without thinking about how you are connected to others around you. A concept that describes this relationship between the self and other is nos/otras, a word in Spanish meaning "us" but which can be literally broken down into "us" and "them." Anzaldúa introduces the concept of nos/otras in order to better understand the relationship between colonizer/colonized, or how we are each implicated in one another. In describing nos/otras Keating (2006) writes,

> We are mutually complicitous—us and them, white and colored, straight and queer, Christian and Jew, self and Other, oppressor and oppressed. We all of us find ourselves in the position of being simultaneously insider/outsider. (p. 9)

In moving closer towards a theorization of interconnectivity, Anzaldúa in her later works wrote extensively about the differences which continue to separate and divide us, yet also provide us with the possibility of healing through an understanding of these divisions (Keating, 2006). To illustrate in more detail Anzaldúa's concept of nos/otras, I quote Keating (2006) at length:

> Anzaldúa's theory of "nos/otras" offers a unique way to discuss commonalities among differently situated individuals and peoples. "Nosotras," the Spanish word for the feminine "we," indicates a collectivity, a type of group identity or consciousness. By partially dividing this word into two, Anzaldúa affirms this collectivity yet also acknowledges the divisiveness so often felt in contemporary life: *nos* implying "us," *otras,* implying otherness. Joined together, nos + otras holds the promise of healing: We contain the others, the others contain us. Significantly, Anzaldúa's theory of nos/otras does not imply sameness; the differences among "us" still exist, but they function dialogically, generating previously unrecognized commonalities and connections or what she describes as "an unmapped common ground." (p. 10)

Thus, the concept of nos/otras is a useful tool for thinking about the ways that we are a part of each other, despite our differences, and that those differences can serve as points of unity rather than as points of division.

With regard to this research project, the concept of nos/otras provided a language to think about how we relate to one another, especially within counterspaces, despite our different worldviews, perspectives, and identities. As youth of color are constantly negotiating who they are, particularly in relation to their peers, their differences are frequent points of contention. Using the concept of nos/otras, however, for this research project allowed me to use these points of contention as ways in which youth could engage with one another across difference.

I noted earlier in this chapter on the section examining YPAR and critical youth studies, some feminist scholars have begun moving towards incorporating an Anzaldúan

framework into PAR and YPAR, because they sought a way to discuss the tensions that arise within their research. I return to that notion here to illustrate how these scholars argue why Anzaldúa was a useful framework that informed the way they thought about engaging and researching with people across multiple positionalities. For example, Torre and Ayala (2009) merge together a PAR framework with an Anzaldúan borderlands framework, to capture the "in-betweeness" of their positionalities and roles as researchers. In recognizing that a part of PAR by definition should include the multiple identities of participants, they write,

> A PAR for social justice must assume multiplicity and hybridity among its participants, if the goal of meaningful liberatory action is to take place. The more a research collective values, grows and builds on the strengths of collective members' various selves, relationships and histories, opportunities for participation increase and windows for action open. The nature of a collective's participation, the co-researchers and even the research participant, should be understood *en movimiento* – as complex, flexible and shifting. (Torre & Ayala, 2009, p. 389)

Here, both Torre and Ayala argue for an inclusive approach that truly values the multiplicities that we bring to various spaces, but in particular critical spaces of research. Foregrounding Anzaldúa as a framework that allows them to situate and center the need to embrace multiple identities, Torre and Ayala illustrate how incorporating these multiple identities actually works to strengthen collective and critical spaces. Utilizing nos/otras, they highlight how we should work across and within difference, without minimizing the ways that we are actually different.

Negotiating our relationships with one another in light of our multiple positionalities has implications for the ways that we relate to each other within counterspaces because we carry who and what we are on our bodies. A large focus of Anzaldúan thought is on negotiating, straddling, and embracing multiple worlds and

social locations. Through invoking a border analysis, Anzaldúa situates the Chicana "subject" in-between various borders, both material and metaphorical, thus placing her in the borderlands. In describing these multiplicities, Yarbro-Bejarano (1994) writes,

> Borderlands maps a sense of 'the plurality of self' (Alarcon, 'Theoretical' 366), which Anzaldúa calls mestiza or border consciousness. This consciousness emerges from a subjectivity structured by multiple determinants—gender, class, sexuality, and contradictory membership in competing cultures and racial identities. (p. 11)

Thus, an explicit part of Anzaldúan thought is recognizing and furthermore negotiating multiple identities at once. In this way, our relationships are structured largely by our experiences "on the margins" and the spaces in which our multiple identities are accepted or rejected.

Anzaldúa's Borderlands incorporates a feminist of color critique, one which shares a Chicana feminist consciousness.[24] However, she further builds upon this early Chicana feminism by invoking in her text not only the physical and metaphorical borderlands, but additionally by centering a queer perspective.[25] What becomes significant about Anzaldúa's Borderlands text specifically (Anzaldúa, 2007), is how it impacted the ability to theorize about the Chican@ experience given the U.S.-Mexico border and the colonial history embedded within it (Elenes, 2011). Additionally, Anzaldúa was one of the earlier scholars to identify a woman-centric understanding of the borderlands specifically tied to geographic location that included spirituality, sexuality, and the body. In making these points, Elenes (2011) writes,

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[24] Because Chicana Feminisms center both the individual and the collective, there is no "single-type" of feminism, but rather it gets enacted differently by Chicanas even though there is a shared consciousness about Chicana positionality. Part of this shared consciousness includes an end to oppression of all women, as well as the recognition of how Chicanos can work in the service of colonialism when they oppress their Chicana sisters.

[25] I use the word queer to challenge the presumed normalness of heterosexuality as well as to invoke the political and social consciousness which challenges this normality.

> The concept of the borderlands is not new, in reality this is an area of scholarship that has existed throughout the twentieth century. What is different is how the borderlands have been reconceptualized through the work of Chicana/o cultural studies scholars, opening possibilities for the formation of border cultural politics that are capable of studying the concrete material border region and the symbolic borderlands. (p. 22)

Citing the work of Anzaldúa as well as Rosaldo's *Culture and Truth,* Elenes (2011) highlights how the concept of the material and metaphorical borderlands has continued to play an important role in understanding how Chican@s are continually "crossing borders." As such, because of their specific histories and positionalities, "[t]he Chicana/o subject does not always have the privilege of deciding whether to cross a border or not" (Elenes, 2011, p. 22); Chican@s, in other words, are continually and fluidly crossing multiple borders because of persistent colonial legacies.

For Anzaldúa, the borderlands are the "in-between" social, discursive, relational, and geopolitical spaces that people on the margins occupy, whereas the border is the physical space which separates, leading in turn to a symbolic/metaphoric space of separation as well as physical (Elenes, 2011). As previously mentioned, "…*Borderlands/La Frontera* has become one of the more circulated texts not only on Chicana/o conceptualizations of the borderlands, but also of Chicana feminism" (Elenes, 2011, p. 38). Through her mixing of literary genres, articulations of negotiating multiple positionalities at once, and her infusion of feminism from a Chicana perspective,

> …Anzaldúa lays the groundwork for the development of Chicana feminist epistemology[26] that germinates from a mestiza consciousness that straddles between cultures, languages, in-between spaces; that recognizes that ambiguity is part of a state of-being-in the world and that opens the possibilities of constructing feminist politics in a third space. (Elenes, 2011, p. 39)

[26] Epistemology is another way of saying how one comes to know and understand the world.

Although many Chicana feminist scholars produced work much earlier than Anzaldúa's Borderlands text, there are many ways in which Chicana feminisms and Anzaldúan thought have informed one another, and further extended the conversation on how Chicanas construct multiple identities and negotiate them.

The importance of space is clearly delineated in Anzaldúa's work. The metaphor of a border, both physical and psychological, is a clear indicator of how space plays a role in the construction of identity. For example, Anzaldúa wrote many of her texts from the position of growing up near the south Texas border. Anzaldúa locates herself both socially and geographically, pointing to the importance of spaces and the history that they carry with them.

In theorizing about the borderlands, Anzaldúa's early work also theorizes about a type of consciousness which comes from her positionality along the borderlands, a mestiza consciousness, which Anzaldúa (2007) describes as a "…*conciencia de mujer*...a consciousness of the borderlands" (p. 99). This mestiza consciousness works to "recenter [Anzaldúa's] brand of Chicana feminism in the concrete, material locations of working-class identified women whose ethnicity and sexuality further dislocate and displace them" (Saldivar-Hull, 2000, p. 59). Thus, a mestiza consciousness comes from the perspective of someone like Anzaldúa, who theorizes from her experiences and centers her multiple identities as important and viable forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. While many scholars and Chicana feminists have found mestiza to be a useful conceptualization of borderlands identity and politics, it is important to note that the notion of mestiza, specifically as it relates to Chican@ identity has been critiqued by several scholars for its connection to indigenous identity, without acknowledging the

indigenous communities which are still largely impacted socially and politically (Alberto, 2012; Saldaña-Portillo, 2001). Addressing this critique, Anzaldúa's later work pushes her theorization of consciousness by introducing us to the path of conocimiento. I elaborate on conocimiento below, because it is the notion of conocimiento that provides me with a frame to analyze my data for this research.

We all find different ways of how we come to our conclusions about the world. Chicana feminists argue that these ways of knowing about the world are specific to the way we experience it, that is, our skin color, outward appearance, expression of our identities, etc. (Anzaldúa, 2007; Elenes, 2011; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Perez, 1999; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008; Saldivar-Hull, 2000). Straddling multiple borders and living in the borderlands, mestiza resistance does not come without a cost. Anzaldúa widely theorized that it is within spaces of tension and pain that exist possibilities for transformation. In other words, conflicting spaces and identities present us with an opportunity to change it into something different, something new.

In particular, Anzaldúa theorized a process for self and collective transformation, what she also deems as a process of undergoing critical consciousness, through her concept of the path of conocimiento (Anzaldúa, 2002). As Burciaga (2010) states,

> Anzaldúa (2002) believes one travels a path of conocimiento (a journey of self-awareness) in times of self-discovery and change. Anzaldúa explains seven stages along the path of conocimiento where the journey takes one from an internal quest to one that is in conversation with a larger social world. (p. 7)

Thus, Anzaldúa envisions this process of transformation and awareness as stemming primarily from a transformation of self that can then extend to the social world, in pursuit of interconnectivity via social justice.

Anzaldúa (2002) talks about a point[27] on the path of conocimiento as nepantla, the in-between stage, the "liminal" middle ground between worlds, identities, and realities. She argues that it is in nepantla where we often spend most of our time and that we also learn to call it "home." In writing about this point, Anzaldúa (2002) states,

> Pulled between opposing realities, you feel torn between "white" ways and Mexican ways, between Chicano nationalists and conservative Hispanics. Suspended between traditional values and feminist ideas, you don't know whether to assimilate, separate, or isolate. (p. 548)

Nepantla becomes a space where we learn to negotiate the various identities we embody, often in ways that are competing or contradictory. Despite these competing and contradictory notions, nepantla can be a stage of transformation and growth.

The concept of nepantla is one that I found particularly useful for this research project given that it allows me to feel at home with the multiple contradictions I embody. Negotiating my role with youth across multiple levels, including my age, citizenship status, educational level, and income, I am faced with the reality that despite my best efforts to be equal with them, I have access to resources that gives me a significant amount of power over them. As Latin@ and Chican@ youth who negotiate multiple realities, they must find a way to contend with them. Nepantla, as an analytical and conceptual tool allowed me to theorize our in-betweeness and embodiment of multiple worlds.

I also found that nepantla was a useful analytical tool with regards to helping me make sense of what youth say and do. This is because many of the youth whom I have worked with embody multiple, competing identities and contradictions, particularly in

[27] I note here that I do not go into specific detail about each point on the path, but rather only the points that are the most relevant to this research project, and particularly the ones that were the most useful in helping me analyze my data.

relation to peer groups. Nepantla, then, was a useful tool that I utilized extensively in analyzing and making sense of my data for this project. Though I discuss this in the next chapters in further detail, what I will say about nepantla as an analytical tool here is that it aided me in understanding how the youth in our counterspace were making sense of themselves as well as each other.

Utilizing our place in nepantla has the potential to move us from inaction or fear to a site of self-transformation. In demonstrating this point, Keating (2006) writes, "…nepantla indicates liminal space where transformation can occur, and like her theory of the Coatlicue state, nepantla indicates space/times of great confusion, anxiety, and loss of control" (p. 8). In other words, nepantla is a place of much pain which can on the one hand serve to paralyze us, or keep us in fear, or as Anzaldúa calls it on a point on the path of conocimiento, the Coatlicue state. The Coatlicue state serves as a point on the path for when we may not know what to do or how to handle the pain we feel. The world around you can appear hopeless and therefore we become trapped in our inability to imagine possibilities for a better world. Yet at the same time, despite this pain, Anzaldúa argues that the pain we feel actually creates a space for transformative possibility. As such, Keating (2006) writes,

> Nepantla is painful, messy, confusing, and chaotic…but nepantla is also a time of self-reflection, choice, and potential growth—what Anzaldúa describes as opportunities to 'see through' restrictive cultural and personal scripts. (p. 9)

Because nepantler@s are situated in liminal spaces, they can also view the world in a fundamentally different way from those who are not living in/on the borderlands or on the margins.

Anzaldúa argues that the path of conocimiento, as a journey for how we come to understand our own processes of critical consciousness, is an ongoing, never-ending journey. This is why in part, Anzaldúa states that we learn to call nepantla home, because we are constantly undergoing processes of growth and pain as our various forms of critical consciousness shift and change. We may also feel that we are experiencing multiple points on the path of conocimiento at the same time, such as feeling that we are both in nepantla and in a Coatlicue state. I relied on Anzaldúa's theorization of a process of consciousness, her path of conocimiento, in large part because she does not present the development of consciousness as being linear. That is, she does not view critical consciousness as an achieved state, but rather as a process that must be continually negotiated and renegotiated. For my research, I found the path of conocimiento to be useful in this way because it allowed me to make sense of how the youth within our counterspace, and in particular the girls, underwent multiple processes of consciousness raising.

Anzaldúa suggests that in moving past the Coatlicue state lies possibilities for self and community transformation. She argues that the Coatlicue state can last for days, weeks, even months. Feeling that we are in a "funk," the Coatlicue state distracts us from our goals of social justice and attempts to kill our resistant spirit. Some may never leave the Coatlicue state. But Anzaldúa (2002) argues that in the process of self-discovery, there comes a time where one realizes "their calling"—that is, their place within a larger movement towards transformative change and social justice. In the process of developing our multiple forms of critical consciousness, one begins to realize the power and strength of collective action and moves in an effort towards this solidarity with others.

This call to action is what Anzaldúa names as another point on the path of conocimiento— "the call…el compromiso…the crossing and conversion." It is a call for us to rethink and reshape ourselves. As Anzadúa (2002) states, "[a]s you learn from the different stages you pass through, your reactions to past events change. You remember your experiences in a new arrangement. Your responses to the challenges of daily life, also adjust" (p. 556). In other words, in this point we continue the process we have already begun of growing as individuals by pursuing our need to make sense of our experiences in the world. When we are experiencing "the call," we have gained new knowledge which helps us make sense of the world in new ways, making us all the more resilient.

On another point on path of conocimiento, Anzaldúa argues that in continuing to make sense of our ongoing consciousness, we work to piece ourselves back together in new and different ways. The fifth point is what Anzaldúa names "putting Coyolxauhqui together…new personal and collective 'stories.'" Specifically, Anzaldúa names the indigenous deity of Coyolxauhqui, who was dismembered by her brothers because she tried to kill her mother. Coyolxauhqui becomes a metaphor for the ways that we can feel split along the path of conocimiento. In piecing ourselves back together, Anzaldúa argues that we do so as a means of developing new individual and collective narratives of resiliency and strength. In illustrating this, Anzaldúa (2002) writes,

> You shed your former bodymind and its outworn story like a snake its skin. Releasing traumas of the past frees up energy, allowing you to be receptive to the soul's voice and guidance. Taking a deep breath, you close your eyes and call back *tu alma*—from people, ideas, perceptions, and events you've surrendered it to. (p. 559)

Through the pain of knowing via your developing consciousness, you begin to collect the broken pieces of yourself in efforts to remake yourself whole. What initially felt to you like shards of broken glass, unable to be pieced together again, feels now like water passing through a sieve; though splintered momentarily it comes back together again as if it was never apart. Anzaldúa argues that this renewed energy, similar to the one she articulates as a part of "the call," sparks your "renewed" self into action.

In describing the path of conocimiento, I have shared how it is a useful way for me to think about processes of consciousness, because the path is not linear, hierarchical, or terminal. Rather, the path of conocimiento encompasses multiple ongoing processes as we struggle to make sense of ourselves and the world around us. Given the relationships that I had already established with the youth who were a part of this study, I anticipated (correctly so) that our counterspace would be messy and filled with contradictions. It was in this messiness, however, that we found the potential to develop something greater. In line with the concepts described as a part of the path of conocimiento, the contradictions and pain that we experienced within our counterspace fostered possibilities for self-transformation and change (this is elaborated on in more detail in Chapter 5).

Anzaldúan thought was furthermore an important framework for this study because of the way that it helped me position border and hybrid identities. As Latin@ and Chican@ elementary aged youth negotiating multiple identities, not quite fitting "here nor there," they were in constant flux. Additionally, the majority of these youth have immigrant backgrounds or are immigrants themselves. Thus, their border identities impacted their relationship to one another, schools, their families, and their broader community. An Anzaldúan lens provided me with a language to think about and theorize

their complex identities recognizing also how as young people, they are positioned in ways designed to disempower and invalidate their desires. Their bodies, for example, are seen as needing control and regulation.

I understand and acknowledge that in order to create and foster sites of transformation, we must be willing to engage in relational dialogues where we openly challenge forms of colonial domination. These spaces and dialogues do not come easy and I know that with young people these conversations can become all the more confusing, particularly as the adults in their lives often control their bodies and their discourses thereby determining what types of conversations are permissible to have and which are not. Furthermore, given all the cliques that happen at school, these students have tenuous relationships with each other that often shift over time, creating new dynamics of interaction. This is the real messy work of relationship building and these dynamics played a role both within our counterspace, but also during their regular school classroom.

Making Connections: How Did These Frameworks Inform My Work With Youth?

I have traced throughout this chapter the ways in which YPAR, CRT, and Anzaldúa informed this research project. Specifically, I began with a discussion on YPAR and critical youth studies because although this was not a framework that I used for this research, that body of literature informed the ways that I wanted to challenge how youth of color are conceptualized by dominant narratives. YPAR, as a critical framework, is hinged on the premise that youth of color are not lazy, disengaged individuals, but

rather that they are critical consumers of the world around them. In this way, YPAR allowed me to not only conceptualize youth of color differently from the dominant narrative, but it also provided some insight into how I could approach my work with Latin@ youth. The Social Justice Education Project (SJEP) that was housed in Tucson, Arizona, is one example of working with youth differently. YPAR also provided me with an initial understanding of how relationships are key to the development of critical youth spaces, or as mentioned previously "youthtopias." Thus the structure and nature of relationships will determine what types of critical dialogues and critical reflection youth of color can engage in.

Counterspaces can function as critical spaces where dominant and deficit narratives of people of color and other marginalized groups can be challenged. I argue that counterspaces can also be important sites where people of color can share and tell counterstories. Counterspaces argue that space, critical discourse, and relationships go hand in hand. As such, physical spaces where youth and educators can gather is important but the relational dynamics are even more important.

CRT allowed me to approach my research in a racial realist fashion by recognizing how schools foster and extend racism and other forms of oppression. In other words, CRT allowed me to think about the structural impact that institutions such as schools have on communities of color who have been subjected to years of racist and colonial schooling. These nonchanging structures influenced how I approached my research, including my desire for co-creating a counterspace.

Though CRT views counterspaces as being important, if not fundamental for providing a space where people of color can build community with one another, the CRT

literature thus far lacks a way of more deeply theorizing what it actually means to be in those spaces and engage in those types of relationships. Thus, I utilized Anzaldúa to help me extend how counterspaces are theorized because it provides a language for me to think about the difficulty and messiness of relationships. Anzaldúan thought allowed me to conceptualize counterspaces as being filled with tension, contradiction and pain. Additionally, it allowed me to more robustly discuss the nature and importance of relationships, which are the essence of the counterspace itself.

In wanting to co-create a counterspace with students, I recognized that despite my best intentions to create transformative spaces for youth, there were still many dynamics at work such as cliques (who is friends with who) and power (I ultimately have power as an adult over them) which impacted our space. It was for these reasons that I incorporated an Anzaldúan framework into my study as it helped me in thinking about the complex ways that relationships are developed with youth of color and the tensions that we experienced in engaging in critical dialogues and reflection.

In putting these two frameworks in conversation with one another, my goal was to illuminate how each of them informed this research project. What each of them currently lacks depth in, however, are concrete and tangible ways to engage in critical discussions with elementary aged youth of color. It is in this arena in particular that my research makes a significant contribution. What does it mean when we expand our idea of "youth" to include youth that we typically call or designate as "children"? What does it mean when we begin critical conversations and dialogues at an even earlier age and how do such conversations impact Latin@ and Chican@ youth specifically?

There is an assumption that when we "expose" the realities of the world to our youth that they will be subsequently disempowered because there is little hope for them. But this assumption is based on the premise that youth of color are not already experiencing pain and contradictions within their own communities and/or their own families. Thus, part of my rationale for wanting to co-create a counterspace was not based on the assumption that I would be able to "fix" everything in their lives. Rather, I sought to create a space where students could share their lived experiences more openly in ways where they would be validated and heard.

The other aspect of these frameworks that was helpful for me is their methodological approaches. These methodological approaches will be further expanded upon in Chapter 3, but it is important to note that these approaches are an integral part of the framework that cannot be separated, particularly in my desire to engage elementary aged Latin@ and Chican@ youth. The next chapter will more specifically focus on the pedagogical and curricular strategies that informed the development and implementation of my Chican@ studies counterspace.

CHAPTER 3

CHICANA FEMINIST METHODOLOGICAL PRAXIS IN THE BORDERLANDS

In this chapter, I delineate my methodological approach to this research project. I relied heavily upon a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) to ground the methodological approach I took in doing this research. Specifically, a Chicana feminist epistemology allowed me to infuse my personal experiences tied to my positionality into the research (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998), including my own k-12 schooling experiences as a second-generation immigrant Chicana living in a predominantly Latin@ and Mexican@ community in Southern California. A Chicana feminist epistemology also allowed me to center the knowledge and ways of knowing that are connected to the lives and experiences of Chicanas and Latinas, specifically as a valid way of doing research (Calderón, 2014; Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). My methodological approach grounded in Chicana feminist epistemology also largely informed the curricular and pedagogical design of the after school counterspace. I describe in detail later in this chapter specifically how my pedagogical approach was informed by a Chicana feminist epistemology and how my pedagogy was connected to my methodological approach.

I begin by providing more information about my positionality and specifically how my k-12 schooling experiences were informed and shaped by this positionality and the ways that I viewed the world. The purpose of me sharing my experiences with schooling is to illuminate how those experiences informed this research project. I then move to a discussion about how I utilized a Chicana feminist epistemology in my methodological approach to this research, highlighting in particular the aspects of a Chicana feminist epistemology that are informed by an Anzaldúan borderlands framework. I address how my pedagogical approach to this research was connected to my methodological approach in that my pedagogy was informed by how I wanted to work with the students, and in essence carry out this research project. In other words, my pedagogical approach for this research informed how I talked with students, how I treated them, and how I chose to go about engaging them in dialogues about their lives. I am arguing in part, that pedagogies are often informed by methodological practices and vice versa because our methodologies are connected to how we approach our research. If we believe that students come from a place of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) then our approach to talking with them and working with them should reflect this perspective.[28]

The latter part of this chapter examines the methods that I used for data collection as well as the analytical tools that were central in the data analysis. The analytical tools have already been described to some degree in Chapter 2, when I highlighted aspects of the path of conocimiento (Anzaldúa, 2002). This chapter more thoroughly, however,

[28] I highlight this as being important because although it appears self-explanatory, it really is not. Far too many scholars and activists of color preach the words of bell hooks or important figures only to reinscribe colonialism onto their community members (Margonis, 2011). This form of re-enacting the codes of Whiteness runs rampant within academia in particular.

outlines these specific methods and tools to illustrate how the data were collected and analyzed.

A "Theory in the Flesh" Born out of Fontana, CA

> …our production of knowledge begins in the bodies of our mothers and grandmothers, in the acknowledgement of the critical practices of women of color before us. The most profound and liberating politics come from the interrogations of our own social locations, a narrative that works outward from our specific corporealities. (Cruz, 2001, p. 658)

I situate this research project as being connected to my own experiences living and growing up in the metaphorical borderlands[29] of Fontana, California. Although I was born in West Covina, CA, in the same hospital where my mom still works today as a service worker, I spent the majority of my childhood in Fontana, which is approximately 45 minutes east of West Covina. I begin this section with a quote from Cindy Cruz's article on the "epistemology of the Brown body" because this notion shapes and informs my identity as a scholar activist, and in particular it has shaped this research project. Specifically, in this quote, Cruz discusses the way women of color, who have been denied access to having their ways of knowing acknowledged as legitimate, have relied on non-Westernized epistemologies that are specific to their experiences, most notably, the body as a source of valid knowledge. Cruz highlights this when she states that "our production of knowledge begins in the bodies of our mothers and grandmothers" (p. 658). This particularly speaks to my own life because of the fact that much of my early knowledge and understanding of the world came from a combination of my experiences

[29] As a reminder for the reader, Anzaldúa describes the metaphorical borderlands as those which hierarchically separate culture, language, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and other positionalities as "other" in relationship to a White, male dominant norm.

and the expertise and wisdom of my older siblings and mother—especially my mother. The resulting "theories in the flesh" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) that I developed as a young, second-generation immigrant, low-income Chicana influenced my decisions to pursue a higher education and subsequently conduct critical research in the area of educational equity for underserved populations.

I understood the different ways that my Brown body was read by others early on, particularly via the topic of my name. To pronounce my name correctly, you have to roll the r's in Socorro, apparently something that many people struggle with. Nearly all of my k-12 teachers, with the exception of one of my fourth-grade teachers, who looked phenotypically White but was actually Latina, struggled in pronouncing my name. I remember always feeling embarrassed, particularly as a young person in elementary school, because my teachers could never get it right. I felt ashamed that I had such a "Mexican name" that only people who spoke Spanish could actually say it correctly. I used to wonder why my parents had chosen Socorro as my first name instead of Elizabeth, which is my middle name, which can be pronounced easily in either Spanish or English. On various occasions I was called "soccer" or "soroco" out loud by teachers. Those "nicknames" stuck with me through k-12 and beyond.

Though it took me years of self-love and care to feel pride instead of shame over my name and how it gets pronounced, these experiences, particularly as they happened in the arena of school, taught me early on the cultural chasm that was present between me and my majority White teachers. Without having the critical language I have now to make sense of it, I understood my name as an integral part of who I was (and am), and whenever my teachers butchered it, it was as if they were cutting into my own sense of

self-worth (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). I certainly felt the disconnect between my home and school environments. At home, everyone could say my name and it never felt out of place. At school, my teachers would mispronounce it as if it left a bad taste in their mouth. The experiences that I had with my name in school, which was connected both to my Mexican identity and my ability to speak Spanish, helped me understand that both Spanish and "Mexican-ness" were not as valuable as English and being White.

As a young person, I began to develop "theories in the flesh" connected in particular to race, class, and gender. I had a theory, for example, about my name—White people were unable to pronounce it. This theory held well until I started meeting White people who either spoke Spanish or grew up in predominantly Latin@ environments. However, during my k-12, I encountered few White people who took the time to learn how to correctly pronounce my name. This led me to develop other theories about what it meant as a young Chicana going through schooling environments where the students were primarily of color, but our teachers were predominantly White. It was in formulating theories about this disconnect that I began to realize other reasons why this disconnect was so prevalent—our teachers did not live in our community, but rather in the wealthier areas of Fontana. Learning more about the lives of our teachers, and even once visiting the house of a teacher when I was in academic decathlon, led me to develop theories about the status of White people in society generally compared to the status of Latin@s. White folks were often middle-income, educated, and worked in professional positions. Latin@s and other people of color were low-income, frequently first-generation immigrant, had parents/guardians who had not attended college, and often

attended to various family responsibilities, including taking care of grandparents and older family members.

In sharing these theories in the flesh, I am not trying to demonstrate that I viewed my positionality as hopeless. Rather, I acknowledged that because of my positionality, I was up against very real material realities that not everyone faced, but most notably, the White people in my life. In viewing the world from this point of view, I understood that there were disparate consequences for people in life that were both somewhat and largely dependent on characteristics such as skin color, surname, accent, and generational status. In developing my critical lens as a young person, however, I did not ascribe to deficit narratives about the reasons *why* people of color, for example, are not as well represented in the professional sector (Valencia, 1997). Though deficit narratives and a culture of poverty (Moynihan Report, 1965) were ideas that I had heard circulate via the media, these ideas did not fit with my understanding of the world, and in particular the strength and resilience that I viewed within my own family.

My mother and her many embodied contradictions, was (and still is) a huge source of strength for me. Growing up, it was she who taught me the feminist sensibilities that I continue to develop to this day. Through her tumultuous relationship with my verbally abusive and sometimes physically abusive father (who passed away when I was 16), I learned not to "take shit" from anyone, especially if they were male. She taught me how to navigate the relationship with my father and to learn how to "deflect" his various forms of abuse. Though my childhood was filled with many painful moments, I understood my mother's advice and *consejos* as what helped me make sense of why my dad was the way that he was. Her strength and resiliency in light of someone who clearly

did not value her, was something that stuck with me. Though I often questioned my mom and asked her why she never left my dad, I knew that my propensity to ask critical questions, even of her, came from everything that she had taught me.

In this way, I connected my theories in the flesh regarding the intersections of race, class, and gender specifically, to the lessons I learned from my mom about surviving in patriarchy as a Brown girl and woman. I used the lessons that I learned from my mom in combination with my own experiences to "interrogate" my social location in asking critical questions about why things were the way that they were. Why was, for example, my dad so abusive? What in society permitted some men to act out against women more so than against other men? Why do men use aggression to elevate themselves and to feel masculine? These broader questions stemmed from the theories in the flesh that I had constructed.

The experiences that I had growing up and in schools as a young Brown girl informed this research in two specific ways: 1) I wanted to construct a research project that I felt would center the knowledge of young Latin@ youth in critical ways, and 2) I sought to develop a counterspace where young Latin@ youth could express themselves more openly. As a young person who had developed theories in the flesh about my own life and positionality, I surmised that the students whom I worked with via Adelante could and were doing the same, given their similar experiences of marginality. In actually working with these students over a number of years, I found that they *were* constructing their own theories in the flesh with regard to their social locations via their experiences and through their bodies. In other words, they were in a way similar to myself, making sense of various forms of oppression via their knowledge from home and their varied

experiences as young people of color. Because I understood these young people as possessing critical forms of knowledge, and also because I knew that ultimately schools have served (and continue to serve) a colonizing function (Calderón, 2014), my positionality fueled my desire in developing this research project. Not completely sure initially of what I would find as a result of this project, I knew that I wanted to use my ability to connect with the lives of students in sharing experiences similar to theirs, to engage them in critical discussions about their lives and the world around them. I wanted to engage them in something that I wish I had the chance to participate in when I was younger and trying to make sense of myself and the world around me.

In this section on my positionality, I outlined the experiences that I had both in school and outside of school that informed my understanding of myself and the world around me. Drawing from Cruz's (2001) epistemology of the Brown body, I demonstrated how my theories in the flesh were connected to my experiences and the lessons of survival that I learned from my mother. Viewing her as a source of strength, my mother passed on to me her feminist sensibilities as a Brown woman who immigrated from Mexico in search of a better life. I also highlighted my schooling experiences with my name and the cultural disconnect that I understood between myself and my predominantly White teachers. In recognizing that my name was "not for everyone," I began to make sense of the ways in which Whiteness functions to create hierarchies tied to language, race and ethnicity among other forms of domination. These experiences informed my decision to critically engage Latin@ youth in a counterspace that would work to center their various forms of knowledge. In the next section I specifically

examine how and why a Chicana feminist epistemology informed and grounded the methodological approach that I took for this project.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology

As an educational researcher working within the confines of schooling institutions, I felt that incorporating a Chicana feminist epistemology to my research was important as a means of challenging the types of knowledges that are validated within academia (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Thus, I draw from the work of Delgado Bernal (1998) when thinking about how my positionality as a Chicana informed this research project and the pedagogical approach I took when working with Latin@ youth. A Chicana feminist epistemology is one that privileges and centers the perspectives and life experiences of Chicanas, who embody multiple borderland positionalities. In writing about this Chicana feminist epistemology, Delgado Bernal (1998) states,

> A unique characteristic of a Chicana feminist epistemology is that it validates and addresses experiences that are intertwined with issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism. (p. 558)

In other words, a Chicana feminist epistemological approach acknowledges and values the multiple positionalities that Chicanas embody, particularly as they connect to a specific colonial history and relationship between Mexico and the U.S., and the U.S. and Latin American countries more generally.

Challenging the traditional ways of conducting research that serve to exclude the knowledge of communities of color,

> …CFE [Chicana feminist epistemology] in education [is] a response to the failure of both mainstream education research and liberal feminist scholarship [in order to] address the forms of knowledge and experiences Chicanas bring to educational

> institutions and research. (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012, p. 515)

In other words, a CFE frame understands and recognizes the importance of centering experiences connected to a Chicana worldview because that worldview in turn impacts the type of research commitments one has, as well as how one goes about engaging in those research commitments. In conceptualizing a CFE within educational research, Delgado Bernal (1998) draws from the work of Anzaldúa, who argues that Chicanas must seek new theories or new ways of theorizing which speak from their experiences such as utilizing the body or spirituality as points of departure for theory (Anzaldúa, 2007). As such,

> …she [Anzaldúa] reveals not only that doing such work represents a critique of dominant research paradigms but, more importantly, that such work, being both spiritual and intellectual, also requires deep introspection and a vision for something different. (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 514)

Thus, in the same way that identities are fluid, so too must our methods be fluid in order to continually imagine a vision that is "new" and different.

CFE has an important concept embedded within it and that is cultural intuition. Specifically, cultural intuition is "…the unique viewpoint that many Chicanas bring to the research process" (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 515). In other words, cultural intuition centers Chicana positionalities as informing the research, and in particular draws from four major sources (in extending the work of Strauss and Corbin's 1990 notion of theoretical sensitivity): personal and professional experiences, existing literature, and the research process itself (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Thus, cultural intuition extends the notion of theoretical sensitivity in order to include issues of place, relationships, spirituality,

sexuality and the collective and historical experiences that shape a Chicana worldview (Calderón et al., 2012). None of these can be divorced from the research process.

Chicana feminist and feminist of color researchers acknowledge the centrality of the body as a valid source of knowledge. Many of these researchers invoke theories in the flesh in their scholarship because they view their epistemological commitments within the realm of academia (but also generally speaking) as stemming from their experiences tied to home and place (Calderón, 2014; Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Cruz, 2001; Pendleton Jiménez, 2006; Saavedra, 2011). Many of them also cite the ways that cultural intuition informed their research process. The scholarship of other Chicanas, Latinas, and feminists of color has come to inform my own methodological approach when thinking about research. Recognizing that writing and research are political acts tied to our sense of who we are (Anzaldúa, 2007; Cruz, 2013; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008), the research process for me involved heavy doses of reflexivity (Flores Carmona, 2014; Pillow, 2003) where I often questioned whether my research was contributing to a broader struggle for social justice, or if it was really only benefitting me in advancing in my doctoral program. In practicing reflexivity, I acknowledge my own discomfort with the process of feeling that I was reinscribing colonial research practices onto the bodies of Latin@ youth. Though this discomfort does not absolve me of my responsibility as a Chicana feminist researcher, it keeps "uncomfortable reflexivity" (Flores Carmona, 2014; Pillow, 2003) at the forefront of my research, a practice that I needed to consistently engage in.

An Anzaldúan framework, in combination with a Chicana feminist epistemology (which draws heavily from Anzaldúa's scholarship), is what allowed me to make sense of

the moments of pain, contradiction, tension, and transformation within the research process. Navigating between multiple spaces along the path of conocimiento (Anzaldúa, 2002), I found that the scholarship of Anzaldúa helped me make sense of the contradictory nature of research, particularly within communities of color. Other Chicana and Latina scholars have also discussed the research process as one that can be painful and fraught with contradiction. For example, Cervantes-Soon (2014) discusses the tensions that she experienced in her ethnographic work in the city of Juarez, Mexico, as someone who was born in Juarez, but eventually crossed the border to complete higher education degrees in the U.S. Wanting to return home to conduct her research, Cervantes-Soon had not considered how her "authenticity" as a Juarense[30] would be called into question given that she no longer resided in Juarez, despite the fact that she maintained family ties to it. In her article, she describes the difficulties that she encountered in returning home to Juarez to do research and realizing that the Juarez she had left behind had changed drastically. Cervantes-Soon invokes Villenas' (1996) notion of the "colonizer/colonized," as someone who was born and raised in Juarez, went to the U.S. for higher education, and then returned back to her community to do research. Cervantes-Soon had both an insider and outsider perspective simultaneously, and had to reimmerse herself in a community that she was from, but no longer a part of. Though she understood how her cultural intuition informed her research approach and data analysis, she also had to contend with her multiple roles as a researcher, but particularly a researcher who viewed her participants as more than just data, but rather as friends and sisters.

[30] Someone from Juarez, Mexico.

Flores Carmona (2014) discusses the difficulties associated with translation in the academy, specifically her research using testimonio with Latina mothers whose native language was Spanish. In attempting to preserve the voice of Latina mothers using the Chicana/Latina feminist methodology and method of testimonio (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), she found that despite her own proficiency in Spanish, it was nearly impossible to capture the complexities and nuances present in the testimonios when they were translated to English. Flores Carmona argues that women of color serve as both literal and figurative translators when doing research in communities of color. In stating this point, she writes,

> As mujeres [women] Chicanas or Latinas, we also participate in our communities playing contradicting roles as educational researchers coming from the academy and as translators and interpreters for our communities. We play the role of writing our people into academia—of translating them from everyday language to academic discourses. (Flores Carmona, 2014, p. 115)

Here, she highlights the contradictions inherent in the work of women of color scholars who wish to do research in communities of color, or communities with which they identify. The contradictions arise as we attempt to translate or put the everyday experiences of our communities into a "discernable," digestible language fit for the academy. Though the knowledge produced by marginalized communities is important to include within traditional academic spaces, we nonetheless face a contradiction in ensuring that our work can be "easily read" or understood, and particularly when our research takes place in a language other than English.

Identifying herself as what she names a Malintzin[31] researcher, Flores Carmona (2014) argues that she is filled with contradictions within the research process and in

[31] Malintzin is a Chican@ and Mexican@ cultural figure who was the translator between Cortes (the Spanish) and the indigenous peoples of what is considered present day Mexico. Though often referred to as

translating critical research into academic spaces. She states that "…the Malintzin researcher is in the in-between, constantly straddling between languages and between the community and the academy" (Flores Carmona, 2014, p. 120). Invoking Chicana feminist language and Chican@ cultural icons, Flores Carmona uses Malintzin as a metaphor for the "in-betweenness" we experience as women of color scholars doing critical work in the academy, and yet embodying marginalized positionalities that can be tied to the communities that we work alongside. Oftentimes feeling as if we are "traitors to our communities" by the fact that we research them for the ultimate purpose of fulfilling academic requirements, the Malintzin researcher is "…wrought with contradictions" (Flores Carmona, 2014, p. 122). Because of these multiple and uncomfortable contradictions, Flores Carmona (2014) argues that

> …we must acknowledge, process, and reflect upon our role as researchers, as interlocutors, as translators, as the purveyors of partial truths. And yes, there is always guilt in the work that we conduct and in the writings that we produce. (p. 122)

In a way similar to both Cervantes-Soon (2014) and Flores Carmona (2014), Saavedra (2011) discusses the process of reflection and questioning that occurs whenever she does research within communities of color. Engaging in a process of reflecciones or self-reflexivity (Pillow, 2003), Saavedra highlights that her positionality informs every step of the research process, including the researcher notes and memos she uses as a part of her analysis. She furthermore, like Flores Carmona, highlights the complexity associated with knowing and representing *voice* as a part of research within academic spaces. Saavedra notes that she can only interpret voice, rather than "give" voice,

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a traitor to her own people for selling them out to the Spanish, several Chicana feminists have re-examined her role as only being a traitor and argue that she in fact had multiple roles, used as a means of survival (Elenes, 2011).

highlighting the problematics that social science research has created for marginalized communities who have voice "given" to them by privileged academics. Recognizing the contradictions within research, Saavedra (2011) writes, "[r]esearchers, and the work we perform, are just a microcosm of a larger complex, contradictory, and ambiguous system" (p. 295). In this way, she acknowledges the ways that systems of domination permeate research praxis, even when we make our best attempts to combat these very systems.

The above literature are only some examples of the work that informs my own approach to research, and specifically, thinking about and making sense of the contradictions we experience within the research process. Knowing that I can only interpret at best the experiences of Latin@ youth for various audiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), I acknowledge my role as a Malintzin researcher, moving between different worlds, including the academy and Brown communities. Drawing from a Chicana feminist epistemology allows me to incorporate the theories in the flesh that inform the type of research that I engage in as a scholar, as well as recognize the tensions that are involved in this work.

In addition to an Anzaldúan framework aiding me in my methodological approach, a concept that I found particularly useful to this research project is Tuck's (2009b) notion of desire centered research. In her article, Tuck first problematizes damage centered research which she argues positions historically marginalized communities and indigenous communities as damaged, broken, and in need of "saving." Centering how years of social science research that works to "extract knowledge" has created distrust within communities, particularly indigenous communities, Tuck points to the harm that this type of exploitative research has created for indigenous and urban

communities. In stating this point, she writes, "[f]or many of us, the research on our communities has historically been *damage centered*, intent on portraying our neighborhoods and tribes as defeated and broken" (Tuck, 2009b, p. 412, emphasis added). Thus, Tuck argues that damage centered research views communities as only one-dimensional, allowing them only to "speak their pain." The issue with this approach, she writes, is tied to the way that indigenous and urban communities are pathologized on the basis of their deficits or their pain alone.

Moving from a one-dimensional to a multidimensional approach to research, Tuck argues that one alternative to damage centered research is reframing it as desire centered research. Desire centered research frameworks "…are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (Tuck, 2009b, p. 416). Desire centered frameworks allow room to center the ways that indigenous and urban communities are situated within multiple systems of domination, which are both reproduced and resisted within these communities. Specifically, she argues that our desires are often complicated and contradictory. The example that she gives to demonstrate this is a group of critical, socially engaged youth of color, who while engaged in activist work, still desire to wait in line for the newest release of Jordans (shoes). The desire to engage in critical praxis can happen in tandem with a desire to purchase the newest Jordans, or the newest iPhone, etc. In illustrating how she conceives of desire, I quote Tuck (2009b) at length:

> Desire is a thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance. It is neither/both/and reproduction and resistance. This is important because it more closely matches the experiences of people who, at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures—that is, everybody. (pp. 419-420)

In this way, desire encapsulates the complexities and multiple ways that we approach our understanding of our marginalized positionality(ies) in systems that work to control our bodies. A desire centered framework, such as Anzaldúa's borderlands, allows one to examine the interstices between reproduction and resistance, particularly when we embody multiple contradictions at once.

In this section, I have outlined Chicana feminist epistemology as the primary methodological approach that grounds this research project. I have also demonstrated how an Anzaldúan framework informs both a Chicana feminist epistemology, as well as the way that I make sense of the tensions I experienced (and continue to experience) as a researcher/scholar/activist. Cultural intuition had much to do with how and why I wanted to conduct this research project, particularly my theories in the flesh that I developed as a result of my positionality. My experiences growing up poor, Brown, and female have given me insight to the ways that the world operates under a colonial rhetoric, particularly within schooling institutions. The previous research and scholarship of other feminists of color has aided me in making sense of the contradictions I experience as a researcher (Calderón et al., 2012; Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Cruz, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 1998; 2013; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Flores Carmona, 2014; Pillow 2003; Saavedra, 2011; Tuck, 2009b). Additionally, Tuck's (2009b) notion of desire centered frameworks in research has been useful in helping me make sense of my own approach to researching alongside Latin@ youth. I sought to highlight and understand how desires are complex and contradictory for elementary Latin@ youth who are given limited agency because of their age.

The next section examines the pedagogical approaches that I undertook in this research, particularly as they connected to a Chicana feminist epistemology and Anzaldúan borderlands framework. Pedagogy mattered for this research because it informed the approach that I took to working with the youth particularly within our counterspace. In part, this was due to the fact that the counterspace was structured as a classroom. Additionally, however, I argue that my pedagogical approaches were tied to my methodology grounded in Chicana feminist epistemology in that they informed my approach to engaging with Latin@ youth. Thus, for the purposes of this project, my pedagogy and methodology are interconnected. The two pedagogical approaches that I will highlight in the next section are Elenes' (2006; 2011) articulation of border pedagogies as well as Revilla's (2004) muxerista pedagogy.

My Pedagogy as Methodology

Pedagogy became an important aspect of this research in that it shaped how I approached working with the students within our counterspace. In thinking about how I wanted to critically engage Latin@ youth, I sought pedagogical approaches that would allow me to forefront and center a Chicana feminist approach and praxis. Thus, although there are a number of critical pedagogical approaches that I could have used to shape this research project, I instead chose to rely on pedagogies that centered feminist of color and muxerista (Revilla, 2004) knowledge. Specifically, a feminist of color pedagogical approach would allow me to embrace the contradictions and tensions that are a part of critically dialoging with others with whom we both do and do not share perspectives with. Rather than view tensions and contradictions as moments of defeat, or of pedagogy

not working well, feminist of color frameworks view these moments as ones that can lead to transformation and even healing, if they are adequately centered rather than brushed "under the rug." Additionally, feminist of color frameworks center the body as a pedagogical tool that is useful for understanding the lives of people on the margins.

Elenes (2006; 2011) writes about her experiences using borderland transformative pedagogies informed by a Chicana feminist lens in her teaching and scholarship. Specifically, she grounds borderland pedagogies in Anzaldúa's borderland scholarship, highlighting how borderlands challenges "dualistic modes of inquiry" (Elenes, 2006, p. 216), which position the oppressor and oppressed as operating dialectically, or in tension with one another. What borderlands offers, Elenes argues, is a framework that goes beyond a dialectic and instead embraces and incorporates multiple positionalities and contradictions, often operating at the same time. In highlighting this, Elenes (2006) writes,

> By recognizing the juggling act that Chicanas must constantly engage in their multiple subject positions (i.e., as students, professors, community activists, and mothers and daughters, to mention only a few), borderland theories capture the complex ways in which Chicanas negotiate and make sense of their position in society. (p. 216)

Using a borderlands framework for Elenes then, signifies a shift from an either/or perspective, and rather incorporates the interstices or the in-betweenness of the oppressor/oppressed dialectic.

In discussing her own teaching approach, particularly in classrooms where students embody and espouse dominant narratives (both White and of color, but primarily White), Elenes (2006) highlights that a borderlands/transformative pedagogy does not shy away from the multiple positionalities present in classroom spaces. In fact, she argues

that a borderlands pedagogy is necessary if we are to embrace multiple subject positions within the classroom. In stating this point, she writes,

> A particular characteristic of borderlands discourse is that it refutes dualistic, essentialist, and oversimplified thinking. Chicana/o border pedagogy seeks to construct theoretical and political movements based on an understanding of a multiplicity of constructions of identity markers, dominant ideologies, and modes of resistance. (Elenes, 2006, p. 248)

Though she recognized the challenges that she faced in talking about topics related to systems of domination within her classroom, Elenes argues that a Chican@ borderlands pedagogy allows us to make sense of the tensions we experience when confronted with ideologies that are vastly different from our own. Using Anzaldúa's metaphor of a bridge, Elenes suggests that in order to move away from dualistic thinking pedagogically, we have to bridge across to one another within classroom spaces.

Elenes' conceptualization of Chican@ border pedagogy was useful to this research project because it allowed me to approach the counterspace with the understanding that tensions would arise as a result of different viewpoints and subject positions. Additionally, it allowed me to think about how I wanted to pedagogically embrace the multiple identities and self-expressions of students, particularly given that the counterspace took place after school. Recognizing that schools are often not spaces where students are free to bring in their whole selves, I sought to understand how I could go about encouraging students to be themselves pedagogically. One way in which I accomplished this for the counterspace was not shaming students for the various ways in which they chose to represent themselves. Though this was difficult because at times it conflicted with the perceptions of their classmates, I sought to nonetheless allow students

to express themselves more freely than they otherwise did within their traditional classrooms, a point that I highlight in more detail in the next chapter.

In one articulation of Elenes' Chican@ border pedagogy, de los Rios (2013) discusses the importance of beginning from a pedagogical standpoint which understands the way that history and geography impact the lives of Latin@s living in the US. In this article, de los Rios discusses a Chican@ centric ethnic studies course she developed for high school students with the intent of providing a space for them to deconstruct their realities. In writing about how she went about choosing her pedagogy, she states,

> Chicana/o cultural studies scholars have adopted the notions of the border and the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987; Perez, 1998; Saldivar-Hull, 2000) as forms of cultural expressions and as a critical means to illuminate race relations in the Southwest and highlight the structural inequality and cultural hybridity that has an impact on Latinas/os (Delgado Bernal et al., 2009). (de los Rios, 2013, p. 61)

Thus, the borderlands for Latin@ students becomes an important framework and way of analysis for the multiple colliding worlds of these youth. Citing Chican@ border pedagogy, de los Rios (2013) articulates it as one that

> …integrates processes of dialoguing, reflecting, posing problems, and position-taking as central knowledge production, understanding the ways in which borders have been used to exclude and silence. (Giroux, 1992, p. 61)

Hence, the concept of borders as they apply to Chican@s and Latin@s in the U.S. draws primarily from an Anzaldúan lens, centering both physical borders and metaphorical borders which influence Chican@ experiences.

In addition to Elenes' Chican@ border/transformative pedagogies, I also incorporated Revilla's (2004) muxerista pedagogy into this research project, which draws from a muxerista framework. Specifically, Revilla discusses a muxerista framework as infusing together aspects of both Critical Race Theory and Chicana/Latina feminisms.

Outlining several aspects that are key to a muxerista framework, Revilla notes that of central importance to this framework is that it is, "…committed to challenging all types of oppression in Chicana/Latina/o communities, including but not limited to racism, imperialism, patriarchy, heterosexism, homophobia, nativism, and monolingualism" (Revilla, 2004, p. 83). In particular, Revilla's conceptualization of a muxerista framework centers Chicana/Latina feminist knowledge and ways of being in the world, which connect to my own life experiences and desire to use Chicana feminist epistemology for my research. A muxerista framework centers theories in the flesh, the lived experiences of Chican@s and Latin@s as sources of strength and resiliency, and utilizes critical, interdisciplinary approaches (such as ethnic studies) to inform praxis.

Muxerista pedagogy is informed by a muxerista framework. As such, it embodies similar principles, including centering the lives, worldviews, and knowledges of Chicanas and Latinas. Additionally, however, as a pedagogical framework, muxerista pedagogy involves forms of engaging in dialogue that are equal exchanges between participants. In other words, a muxerista pedagogy values the knowledges and perspectives of all participants. Furthermore, a muxerista pedagogy fosters a "…safe space nurtured by warmth, playfulness, love, and fun" (Revilla, 2004, p. 92). And lastly, a muxerista framework, in line with both CRT and Chicana/Latina feminisms, "…is committed to creating social change through Chicana/Latina resistance to *all* forms of subordination" (Revilla, 2004, p. 92). Here, Revilla makes a distinction between this challenge to subordination from the way that CRT describes it in that she centers "Chicana/Latina resistance", specifically bringing to the fore a Chicana/Latina feminist praxis and approach to combating oppression.

Combined, both Chican@ border/transformative pedagogies and a muxerista pedagogy provided me with the tools to engage Latin@ youth in multiple ways. In particular, these two pedagogical frames aligned with my methodological approach of using Chicana feminist epistemology. In this way, I argue that my pedagogical approaches are interconnected with my methodology for this research. Chican@ border/transformative pedagogies and a muxerista pedagogy allowed me to integrate discussions into the counterspace tied to positionality and identity, while at the same time validating theories in the flesh as knowledge. Additionally, these pedagogical frameworks allowed me to look beyond simplistic modes of engaging in critical dialogue and instead centered tension and discomfort as a part of the learning process. In a space where Latin@ youth and their multiple self-expressions collide, this approach was particularly useful in implementing desire centered research frameworks, where desires can exist in contradictory ways. This allowed me to capture (read: interpret) the nuances and complexities that young Latin@ youth embody.

The ensuing sections of this chapter delineate the methods that I used in my approach to this research, informed by a Chicana feminist epistemology. Specifically, I highlight how the course was designed, the logistics of the course, and delve into the ethnographic methods that I used throughout this project. I end with discussing the approach I took in analyzing my data.

Counterspace Design and Structure

The first "run-through" of the Chican@ studies counterspace came in the 2013-2014 academic school year, the year before I actually collected data. The counterspace

was co-developed and co-instructed by myself and a good friend, colleague, and graduate student who was also in my same department at the University of Utah, Sylvia Mendoza. We met when I began my doctoral program in the fall of 2011 because we were both coordinators for the oral history project in the Adelante partnership at Jackson Elementary. It was during this time as co-coordinators where we had the opportunity to not only develop close relationships with the students whom we worked with, but also with each other. Given our responsibilities at Jackson, we saw each other at least four times a week, met extensively to plan curriculum, and participated in other school events. It was during this time that we had the opportunity to solidify our friendship, particularly given our academic and intellectual interests.

The process that we underwent in co-developing the Chican@ studies course speaks to the Chicana feminist practice that Sylvia and I embody. Going against how academia often forces us to be in competition with one another (Cutri, Delgado Bernal, Powell, & Ramirez-Weiderman, 1998), we engaged in a collaborative process of exchanging ideas frequently. This collaboration aided me extensively in my own thinking, conceptualizations, and analysis of my research.

The first cohort of students that participated in the Chican@ studies counterspace during the 2013-2014 school year served as a pilot study for me and informed decisions that Sylvia and I made in co-implementing the class a second time. I primarily focus here on the course logistics of the 2014-2015 school year, which is the year that I collected my data, acknowledging that we learned much from doing the course the first time around.

Class Curriculum

The counterspace was designed as an after school Chican@ studies college course. More specifically, it was intended as an after school course that met twice a week, every week, for 1 hour, from approximately late September to early May. We called it a "college course" because that language aligned with the college-going culture nurtured at Jackson by Adelante, and we also wanted students to feel that they were taking a college course because of the material and structure of the class. Having the support of both the principal and vice principal at Jackson made the process of co-developing the course run much smoother in that we had a designated space (the community classroom), at the school where we met with students. In essence, this space became the classroom/counterspace.

For the counterspace, we drew from practices that we ourselves experienced in our Chican@ studies courses as undergraduates/graduates, as well as other educational courses that critically examined systems of oppression. In particular, I drew from Yosso's (2002) articulation of a Critical Race curriculum in informing the course topics. A Critical Race curriculum, drawing from CRT, emphasizes challenging multiple forms of subordination through an understanding of how structures work to maintain White supremacy. Additionally, a Critical Race curriculum values the importance of experiential knowledge as a part of the discourse and learning process. Lastly, Critical Race curriculum subverts the dominant narrative by fore-fronting revisionist forms of history to include the voices of historically marginalized peoples and their forms of resiliency against oppression.

We included media as text within the class because we knew that students were familiar with using and engaging in multiple forms of digital literacy. From the relationships that we had developed in the years prior with students, we had a sense of the type of music that they liked, the type of shows that they watched, and the multiple formats that they used to access media (computers, phones, etc.). In this way, we took examples of digital texts that they were familiar with, such as the show Family Guy, and we would engage them in critical discussions about it. Our goal in doing this was to not only utilize a media text that was familiar to them, but to have them reframe how they had previously understood it, or in other words, we challenged them to see these texts in a different, more critical light. We also gave them journal prompts for journal writing that would often ask them to reflect on the clips we showed them and connect them to their personal lives. We also incorporated some Chican@ literature, such as vignettes from *House on Mango Street* and the poem *I am Joaquin.*

Specific concepts that we focused on for the course included race and racism, immigration, gender, and borders. For these concepts, Sylvia and I spent numerous hours piecing together curriculum from different sources, some of which we derived from our own scholarly training, and then "translated" this curriculum into a language that would be more understandable and relatable to their experiences. We developed multiple activities including acting out, writing, and drawing, that we felt would give them various opportunities to utilize their multiple talents. In particular, we focused on developing ongoing projects that integrated research, writing, and oral presentation skills. For example, we had students do a family history project where they were asked to interview a family member, and develop questions for that family member about their childhood,

where they grew up, and thoughts about school. Figure 4 illustrates two of the slides that we showed students in class when we were prepping them for the family history project. I share these two slides as an example of the types of in-class activities that we did throughout the school year.

We also attempted to use pop culture specific examples, such as memes (an image with text), to engage in the course topics. Figure 5 demonstrates two examples of memes that we showed them in class when talking about Columbus Day. We used these memes as a model when we asked students to create their own memes on a topic that we had discussed in the class, including race, racism, and gender inequality. A theme that was central and embedded throughout the course was the notion, and the ontological and epistemological question of, "who am I?", as a means of getting students to engage in an understanding of their multiple positionalities. Thus, at the core of our curriculum, we sought to provide opportunities where students could engage with and interrogate their own subject positions.

Participants

Participants were chosen based on purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009), whereby I selected Latin@ fifth-grade students whom I had had a previous relationship with, for the 2014-2015 school year. The first cohort, which consisted of both fifth and sixth-graders, often clashed because of the power dynamics between them, namely, the sixth-graders "dominating" the fifth-graders during the class. For this reason, I selected only fifth-graders. I selected 18 students I identified broadly as Latin@ (because I had known them for some years, I knew they identified as Latin@, Hispanic, or Mexican@),

to volunteer to participate in the class. These 18 students were all from the same fifth-grade bilingual classroom. They were selected on the basis of the relationship that I had developed with them as well as whether or not they had previously shared aspects of their personal lives with me throughout the 3 years that I had known them. Of these 18 students, an initial 9, who were primarily female, wanted to participate in the class. I ended up having a consistent total of 12 students (8 female and 4 male) who identified as either Mexican@ or Chican@. At times there were more than 12 students (when for example siblings would join us), and at other times there were less than 12 (when some students were not in attendance). The students were allowed to select their own pseudonyms for this research.

Before students could join the class, they were asked to complete an application process, consisting of two essay questions: 1) Describe the world that you come from (family, school, community) and 2) explain why you want to join this class. They were asked to write at least two paragraphs consisting of 4-5 sentences to answer each of these questions. Many students wrote more than what was required. The application was done in part to maintain consistency in terms of attendance because we wanted students to demonstrate that they were committed to the class, as well as to gain greater insight into how the students viewed and made sense of their world.

Before our first class session, I held a parent meeting with the students' parents to inform them of their child's voluntary participation in the class, as well as the logistics of the class itself. Although I invited all of the parents, not all of them were able to attend this meeting. I provided both assent and consent forms to parents and their children.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Data were collected during the 2014-2015 academic school year. I began collecting data in late September and finished early May. In total, accounting for the times that we did not meet because of vacation breaks, school recess, or conflicts in scheduling with after school sports, we held 42 college class sessions. The methods that were used in data collection were ethnographic (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, I engaged in participant observation, including writing field notes and researcher memos. I also collected and retained documents such as the college class applications, the students' classwork (including in class journals), and their digital projects that they completed at the end of the school year. Given that this research was ethnographic, much of my data also came from multiple sources of dialogue including in the hallways, during recess, or during school sponsored events.

Another data collection method that was utilized in this research and that is connected specifically to the Chicana feminist epistemology that grounds my methodology is pláticas (Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Gonzalez, 2001). Pláticas are both a methodology and method that can be tied to Chicana/Latina feminist practices and pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Specifically, pláticas were useful for research with Latin@ youth because of the informal and communal nature in which pláticas occur. Pláticas are rooted in the Chican@ oral tradition of sharing one's life experiences as well as processes of self-discovery that happen in dialogue with others (Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010). Pláticas take place in the everyday and do not follow a set script, but rather can take the form of *chisme*,

dichos, cuentos, or other forms of oral storytelling (Gonzalez, 2001). Chican@ social science researchers have written about pláticas since the 1970s (Valle & Mendoza, 1978), but they have done little to conceptualize how pláticas are tied to Chicana/Latina methodological practice, and often described them as a method (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016).

Gonzalez (2001) utilized pláticas in her research with Mexicanas in order to gain more insight into their process of womanhood. Highlighting this approach, Gonzalez (2001) writes,

> I also engaged in personal and group conversations. I refer to this strategy as *platicas y encuentros,* a way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations. (p. 647)

Thus, utilizing pláticas for Gonzalez tapped into a specific type of cultural knowledge using a culturally familiar way of conversing, one that is structurally different from the "typical" interview, or how they are discussed in various qualitative method texts (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Pláticas are structurally different from interviews not only because the nature of their content is more varied (i.e., there is not a set of questions that must be answered) but additionally because they can take place in the everyday. For Chicana/Latina scholars who have engaged in plática methodology, they describe these pláticas as happening over the phone, at home, in community spaces, and even over lunch (Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Gonzalez, 2001). Pláticas often involve sharing deep feelings and emotions as well as joking or bromiando, all of which are a part of the same conversation, at times difficult and at other times easy flowing (Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Gonzalez, 2001).

In seeking to more concretely conceptualize a Chicana/Latina methodological praxis of pláticas, Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) outline a set of contours that they connect to pláticas as a methodology and method. Specifically, these contours are that pláticas: 1) view and honor participants as co-constructors of knowledge; 2) incorporate everyday lived experiences as part of research inquiry; 3) are two-directional and based on reciprocity, vulnerability, and researcher reflexivity; 4) provide a potential space for healing; and 5) draw heavily from Chicana/Latina feminist theory. Many of these contours draw from research methodologies tied to a Chicana feminist epistemology and Chicana/Latina feminist ways of knowing. These contours informed but did not always define the pláticas that I had with youth in this study. That is, not all of the contours were necessarily present within the same plática.

Pláticas were particularly useful for this study because of the conversational and familiar way they allowed me to engage with youth. In particular, traditional interviews with elementary youth do not look the same as when they are conducted with adults. Specifically, the young people in this study, constrained in school and even at home by how often they could use their voices, frequently switched topics in conversations and relished the opportunity to speak and be heard. Thus, pláticas allowed me to engage with them in dialogues that were two-directional and reciprocal, and not necessarily dictated by set questions that I was intent on asking. In the experiences I have working with young people, they speak about their lives in a way that follows more of a plática "format," in that it occurs in the everyday, informally, and often through the use of narrative. In this way, pláticas provided flexibility in conversation topics in such a way that youth could focus on the topics that were most relevant to them.

Though I have said here that pláticas can often happen informally, this is not to suggest that the pláticas themselves, even when informal, do not provide "deep insight" or wisdom (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Rather, the opposite is true in that the wisdom and insight lie in what traditional social science researchers may deem as informal, and perhaps even irrelevant to what is considered data. For example, although I did not have a set of questions, I did have broad areas of inquiry that I wanted to learn more about during our pláticas, such as, how do these students reflect on what they like and dislike about school? On many occasions, before I could get to asking more about my broad areas of inquiry, students had their own agendas in terms of what they wanted to discuss. However, in allowing them to speak, I often found that I would not even have to ask them about school, for example, because naturally, in our plática it would come up. Thus, although traditional researchers would perhaps consider conversations about ice cream or movies as tangential, they actually in turn often led to "deep conversations" about students' life experiences connected to race, gender, and bullying.

In summary, I used both ethnographic methods for this research as well as a plática method that was connected specifically to my Chicana feminist epistemological approach. The ethnographic methods took the form of participant observation, field notes, researcher memos, and student coursework and written text. College class sessions were also audio recorded and later transcribed. Our in class discussions were often more related to the topics that we discussed that day, such as a media clip about gender. However, the pláticas were more varied in nature. Pláticas, as I have outlined extensively, allowed me to dialogue with youth in a way that felt more natural to them and two directional, rather than scripted by interview questions. Pláticas also allowed me to center

their knowledges and theories in the flesh as data, rather than as tangential topics that are unrelated to the research.

All of the data that were collected, transcribed, and analyzed were kept private, stored only on my password protected computer. The names of all individuals in this study are pseudonyms, with the exception of my colega Sylvia. Students were given the option to volunteer in the college class and pláticas, and could at any time chose to opt out of either without repercussion. Only the girls volunteered to participate in the pláticas. All of them were group pláticas in that there were always at least two students present and myself during each of the pláticas. The majority of the pláticas took place in the library, were audio recorded, and lasted anywhere from 1 to 2 hours. In the following and final section of this chapter, I discuss my approach to data analysis and the tools that were helpful to me in this process.

Data Analysis

My approach to analyzing the data for this research was based on modified grounded theory (Calderón, 2008), informed by a Chicana feminist epistemology. Specifically, a modified grounded theory approach allowed me to examine the data using an abductive approach, rather than strictly only inductive or deductive (Malagón, Pérez Huber, & Vélez, 2009). Thus, although I was developing theory from the ground up (inductive), I also knew that particular themes tied to oppression and marginality would arise because they are the structures that inform how our lives are often governed and shaped (deductive). An abductive approach then combines aspects of inductive and deductive reasoning such that I did not "walk in" to my research without having any

sense of what I would find. Rather, using my cultural intuition and theories in the flesh, I was able to construct grounded theory while being informed by my own positionality and experiences in k-12 schools in making sense of the data.

I utilized qualitative research software, Atlas.ti, to help me organize and compile my data. Though the software has tools that researchers can use to code and analyze their data, Atlas was a program that I used more for the purposes of organization, rather than the actual tools it offers for coding. In coding my data, I first began with a process of open coding (Maxwell, 2013) whereby I kept myself open to what the data would present. This entailed mostly locating descriptor codes. In my second round of coding, I used focused coding (Maxwell, 2013) to help me group together descriptors into themes and patterns across the data. After these two rounds, I engaged in subsequent rounds of axial coding (Saldaña, 2009), where I combined themes into categories and subcategories.

Once I had constructed themes and categories, I went back to doing line-by-line analyses of the transcripts. I wrote out the themes in my researcher journal and then examined these themes in relationship to the categories that I developed as a result. This helped me visually understand the relationship between themes, categories, and subcategories. In examining these themes and categories, I would go back to not only the transcript but additionally relistening to the audio from the transcript, and gaining more insight into not only what was said, but how it was said. This included inflections, pauses, and laughter, for example, and it allowed me to go back and connect the audio with the field notes and researcher memos that I had for that particular clip. In this way, I reconstructed my understanding of the audio where students also used body language,

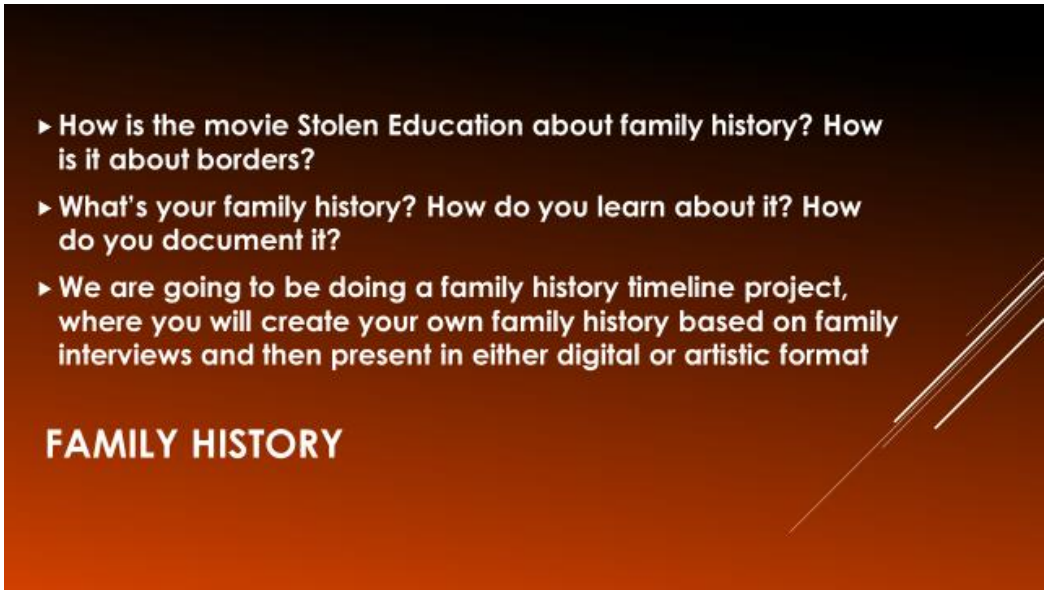
such as flicking their hands, rolling their eyes, and other nonverbal cues that went along with what they were saying.

As I have mentioned earlier, my relationship with Sylvia and the process of co-developing and co-teaching the college class with her provided me with insights that were useful to my own thinking and analysis of the data. Although the ethnographic methods I used and pláticas were done and recorded only by me, I acknowledge and recognize that Sylvia's insights played a role in how I made sense of the data. Because we interacted so frequently in planning the curriculum together, I had the opportunity to engage with Sylvia often about what we were witnessing in the class and our thoughts about it. This, in turn, influenced my thinking as I constructed themes and categories from the data.

Although pláticas took place informally throughout the school year, the pláticas that I actually scheduled with the girls who wanted to participate with their friends took place in April. By this time, we were bringing the college class to a close. During these pláticas I had the opportunity to member check with students and ask them more about the themes that I had been hearing throughout the school year. For example, a major theme that arose from the data was the tension between boys and girls generally in schools. The pláticas at the end of the school year allowed me to ask them more about this tension. Thus, these particular pláticas that happened with only the girls present helped me make sense of how they were understanding their relationships with boys at school.

This chapter examined in detail my methodological approach to this research. Throughout the chapter, I outlined how my methodology was grounded in a Chicana

feminist epistemology. At the outset of this chapter, I provided context to my positionality and how my theories in the flesh informed my desire to want to engage in this research project. I also shed light on how my cultural intuition was shaped by my lived experiences. Subsequently, I elaborated on how I was using Chicana feminist epistemology and highlighted the research of other feminists of color who engage in critical discussions around researcher positionality and reflexivity. I then transitioned to a discussion about how my pedagogical approaches were both shaped by a Chicana feminist epistemology and also connected to this methodology. In particular, I highlighted Elenes' (2006; 2011) border/transformative pedagogies and Revilla's (2004) muxerista pedagogy as informing my own approach with youth specifically within the college class. These pedagogical approaches allowed me to center a Chicana/Latina feminist praxis that rejects dualities and instead seeks to understand the ways contradiction and tension can lead to transformation. The second half of this chapter examined the college class course design, as well as my data collection methods and approach to analysis. In these sections, I highlighted the logistics of how I did this research project as well as the way that pláticas played an important role in how I approached my data collection. My Chicana feminist epistemological approach to this research allowed me to draw from feminist of color tools/concepts to make sense of my data. In particular, I drew from the tools offered by Anzaldúan scholarship, including the path of conocimiento, nepantla, and nos/otras. In both Chapters 4 and 5, I elaborate in more detail how these tools aided me in analyzing my data.



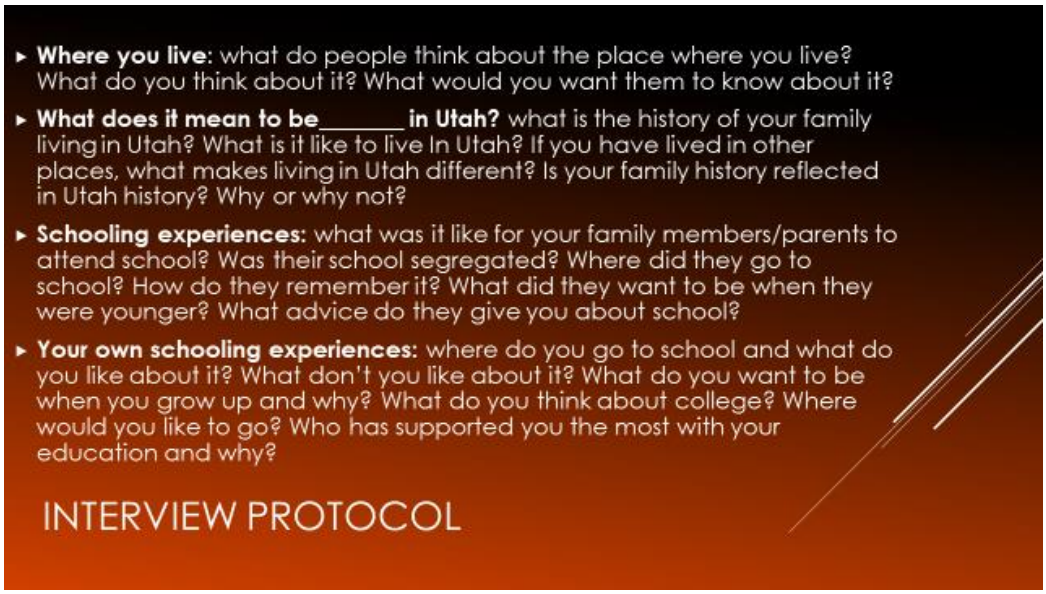


Figure 4. Slides that were shown to students in class for a project on family histories.

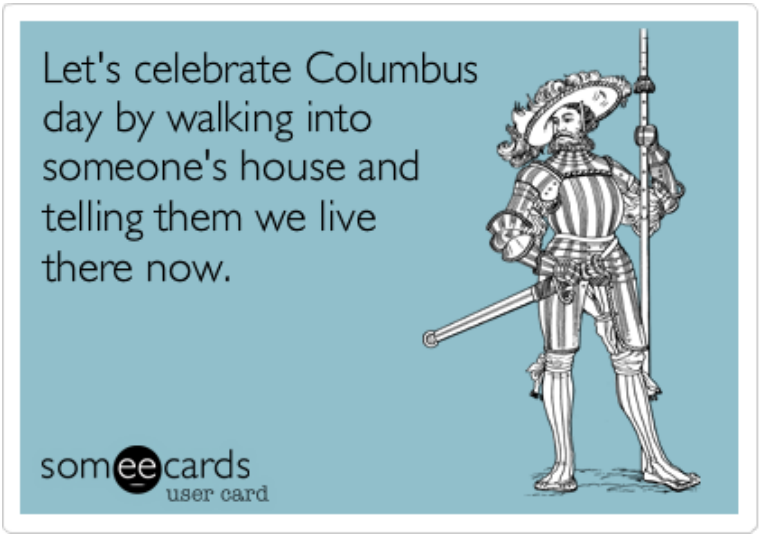


Figure 5. Memes that we showed the students in class when we had a discussion about Columbus Day.

CHAPTER 4

DECONSTRUCTING THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF A CRITICAL RACE COUNTERSPACE WITH LATIN@ FIFTH-GRADE YOUTH

When I initially set out to conduct my research, I was fueled by a plethora of critical literature, and a set of experiences that guided my genuine interest in enacting change for others, but particularly for the Latin@ youth whom I had come to view as family. I wanted to change their lives in ways that I wish mine would have been changed at their age. I wanted them to know at least some of what I understood as a college student by exposing them to ideas and concepts that they could somewhat understand, but that would push their thought process even further. What I perhaps underestimated in undertaking this, was the process *itself.* This is not to suggest that I went into it blindly, and in fact having worked with these youth in classroom spaces, I was familiar and aware of how those spaces functioned for them. But there was a different feeling of accountability and responsibility that I felt as a researcher; a researcher who desired to, in essence, push their development of their critical consciousness (hooks, 2003).

This chapter specifically focuses on understanding what the process was like in co-developing a Critical Race counterspace with Latin@ elementary youth. It specifically addresses my first research question: What is the process of co-constructing

a Chican@ studies counterspace for/with fifth-grade Latin@ students? These findings also answer in large part my second research question: What types of relationships and interactions are present within this Chican@ studies counterspace? The process of co-constructing a counterspace with Latin@ youth, as I experienced it, had four major components: relationship building, centering critical discourse, embracing multiple forms of self-expression, and embracing the tension of contradiction. All four of these components proved to be important aspects of developing and maintaining the counterspace, and serve as the overarching themes of my findings. Although they are intertwined and overlap, I will discuss them as "separate" components of counterspaces.

My hope is that this chapter will illuminate the complex and messy process of doing critical work on race, class, gender, and other forms of subordination with Brown, elementary, youth. Having engaged in a continual process of reflection of my experiences working with young, Brown youth, I have come to see the process as meaningful and significant. Although the analysis that I share in this chapter is specific to the context that I had working with elementary youth, I believe there is much that can be applied to other contexts and even age groups. I elaborate on how it can be applied in Chapter 6.

The data that I share in this chapter highlights the complex ways that Latin@ elementary youth navigate their education, particularly in the face of deficit teachers and what they called "boring" curriculum. The data also speak to the various embodied knowledges that these youth possessed and how they engaged in their own "self-preservation" on school grounds (Villalpando, 2003). Although all too often the actions of elementary youth are construed as being tied specifically to their age and level of development, I argue that much of what they shared reflected experiences that are tied to

a positionality on the margins (Anzaldúa, 2007), which subsequently impacted their day-to-day decisions. I organize this chapter into the four major themes that I outlined above: relationship building, centering critical discourse, embracing multiple forms of self-expression, and embracing the tension of contradiction. Each of these four themes is also divided into subthemes. These themes are not necessarily ranked in any type of order, though relationship building was such a major finding that my next chapter is dedicated to examining relationships within the space in more detail.

Understanding How Counterspaces Can Function at the Elementary Level for Brown Youth

In the sections below, I delineate the important aspects of developing a counterspace with youth that I understood as a result of my research. Though I relied heavily on CRT to aid in my understanding of counterspace, what I found and highlighted in Chapter 2 is that CRT scholars have yet to fully theorize counterspaces beyond the fact that they serve as "…sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged" (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 70). For this reason, I found concepts rooted in Anzaldúan thought, including nepantla and nos/otras (Keating, 2006), to be useful in helping me analyze the daily interactions that form counterspaces. Thus, in conceptualizing counterspaces, I blend aspects of CRT with Anzaldúa's scholarly work on relationships and contradictions in ways that I believe can be useful in further developing what the intricacies of counterspaces are.

Though the counterspace that I co-created with Brown youth was structured as a class, counterspaces are inherently pedagogical in nature. As mentioned in Chapter 2,

much of the literature that focuses on the impact of counterspaces views them as sites where knowledge is shared and co-constructed, and most importantly, this knowledge explicitly challenges various forms of subordination (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008; Nuñez, 2011; Revilla, 2004; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, & Howard, 2013; Yosso, 2006). Although the *specific* pedagogies that arise in counterspaces will vary in nature, they will undoubtedly share the common thread of centering knowledge from the body and margins (Cruz, 2001; hooks, 2004). In my case and as is discussed in Chapter 3, I utilized a pedagogical approach that felt appropriate to my work with youth: muxerista pedagogy (Revilla, 2004). Muxerista pedagogy allowed me to center Chicana feminisms and CRT as part of the pedagogical process, but with a specific focus on the power of relationships between girls. Additionally, a muxerista pedagogical orientation centers the lived experiences of Chicanas. I found this aspect to be particularly useful to my research given that the majority of the students in the class were female, and several class meetings only had females present.

I begin first by examining the importance of relationships within counterspaces, quite simply because I argue that without relationships there is no counterspace. I specifically examine both the relationship between myself and the youth, as well as their peer relationships.

Relationship Building

Relationships proved to be an essential component of co-constructing the counterspace. In Chapter 3, I described my rationale for wanting to undertake this research project. Included in that rationale was the fact that I had already developed

relationships with the students I wanted to invite to participate. Though I believe I could have still done my research without having established those prior relationships, I found that they aided the students in deciding whether or not they wanted to be a part of the college class. I had come to know the students via my research assistantship with the Adelante Partnership. Working with them since second grade on critical curriculum projects during school (the Oral History Project), they often described me as someone who "was nice," "listened to them and their feelings," and "someone they had fun with." When asked why she chose to participate in the class initially, one student said, "…cuz like when we do like the Adelante stuff like with our stories and writing and stuff, like ohp [oral history project]...it's really fun, so then it seemed funner."

There are different aspects of relationships that helped determine not only which students wanted to participate, but also whether or not they wanted to continue their participation. Relationships in this space, like in any other, shifted over time, not only between myself and the students but also amongst themselves. There were two major themes that I saw being connected to relationship building within the counterspace: 1) my role as a "nepantla adult" and 2) which of their friends were in the space (and what they said about it). Specifically, mine and Sylvia's role within the space proved to be of particular importance because we were viewed as what I call "nepantla adults," where we lived between multiple and shifting roles. I begin first with examining how they conceptualized us as "nepantla adults" and then shift the discussion to examining how they incorporated peers as part of their relationship development.

Nepantla Adults

Throughout the year, I reflected consistently on what my role in the counterspace classroom was. I knew that by default, no matter my pedagogy, I was going to have a significant amount of power over them as the adult in the room. However, I tried to use this power in ways that I thought would guide them, rather than control them. In keeping true to my muxerista pedagogical lens, I attempted to ensure that each discussion "…involve[d] natural dialogue, questioning, and dialectical exchange between equal participants" (Revilla, 2004, p. 92). Though this was difficult to do with young Brown youth who had been sitting in chairs for most of the day, I viewed each time we met as an opportunity to continue working on this characteristic of a muxerista pedagogy.

My end of the year pláticas, where I asked students to reflect on aspects of the class, also helped me gain insight into how they had perceived myself and Sylvia throughout the year. There was no one role in particular that students viewed us as having, but rather, a mix of multiple roles at different times. In the excerpt below, I ask students what are some of their reasons for liking the class, and they point to the relationship between us.

> Sky:…and I like you guys, I don't consider you guys like teachers teachers, like serious teachers and stuff, yeah…
>
> Socorro:…what are we to you guys, I'm curious.
>
> Sky and Belinda: Friends! (both shout at the same time)
>
> Samantha: Family! You're family, you're family…

Here, students highlight that they do not view us as "serious teachers," but rather as friends and family. Prior to this point in the conversation, which I will highlight later in

this chapter, Sky was contrasting us to their fifth-grade teacher, who according to the majority of the students "talked too much" and sounded like "the teachers in Charlie Brown" (referring to the muffled trumpet sounds when the teacher speaks). In another plática, the students compare me to family in a sense, but also demonstrate that I am still different even from their families.

Socorro: You guys have maturation tomorrow, are you excited?

Guadalupe: Ewww, no! I'm just kidding.

Selena: Ewww!

Max: That's the end of our childhood.

Lupita: Can you come?

Socorro: You guys want me to go?

Students together: Yea!

Socorro: But there's people who are like, 'oh I don't want nobody to go, I don't want to talk about it'…

Lupita:…that's ok you can go….

Max:…they said parents and all that can go.

Socorro: Do you guys want your parents to go?

(Selena shakes her head indicating no)

Max: My mom can't go.

Guadalupe: My mom is gonna be like 'ya ves Guadalupe, tienes que poner atencion,'[32] and I'm like 'no mom' (says this last part in a sarcastic, annoyed voice).

[32] See Guadalupe, you have to pay attention.

Max: I wish my mom would go but she has work. She would go.

Socorro: So you want your moms to go or you don't want them to go?

Lupita and Guadalupe together: No thank you.

In this example, the students' comments indicate that I am both like their family and also not like their family at the same time. The maturation event that we are referencing is the annual "lecture" that fifth-graders get about puberty and how their bodies will change as they get older. That entire week during our after school class meetings, nearly every student, but in particular the girls in the class, described their discomfort with having to attend maturation. They called it "gross," "nasty" and questioned why they had to learn about "that stuff" during school. Max even makes the statement "it's the end of our childhood," indicating how seriously they take maturation. Interestingly enough, the only one of the girls who is ok with their mom attending maturation is Max, who mentioned later in that conversation that her mom has already told her about puberty, so learning about it does not bother her too much. The rest of the girls are in agreement that they do not want their moms to go, but are "ok" with me going, and in fact, even ask me to go. I view this as an example of a nepantla space, where I am in between being like a family member, but not quite like a family member because the majority of the girls were more accepting of me attending maturation than their own mothers. I am not suggesting that the students trusted me more than their own mothers, but rather that they were aware of what they could share with their parents, and how in some cases it differed from what they would share with me.

In addition to being viewed as some version of a family member, I believe that oftentimes I was viewed as an older friend. This perception stood out to me the most

when I was doing the pláticas. Specifically, all of the pláticas were difficult to end. What I mean by this is that, if it had not been for their parents coming to pick them up and the students having to leave, the pláticas could have gone on much longer. In many cases, students would either call their parents or receive phone calls from them, and they would tell them that they "needed" to stay longer to finish "an interview." On purpose, nearly all of the girls would try to stay much longer than they normally would stay on any other regular school day. In part, I believe this happened because they viewed me as a nepantla adult, someone they could hang out with and someone that would listen to them. It also happened because their parents and family members allowed them to be with me beyond school hours. In the excerpt below, Jimena's mom had already called her twice to let her know that she was waiting outside.

Socorro: Your mom's here already?

Jimena: Yeah. I'll go in like two more minutes.

Socorro (laughing): In two more minutes she's going to come in here and scream at you. And me.

Jimena (laughing): It's Socorro's fault! (saying what she would say if her mom came in the room).

Socorro: No but you should go, if you want to talk another time, I don't mind.

Jimena: We should talk another time.

Even though I had told Jimena that she should have left the first time that her mom called her, she clearly was caught up in the moment, and talked a great deal during that particular plática. Though she had the opportunity to share for an hour long plática, she still wanted to meet another time to talk more. On at least two occasions, I had more

than one plática with the same group of students because they kept insisting there was more to discuss. Thus, my role as a nepantla adult, who listened and allowed them to talk about almost anything, influenced their desire to not only continue with the pláticas, but also continue their participation in the class. All of the students whom I had pláticas with were regular participants who attended the class all year.

Another factor that I believe played a role in delaying the pláticas to stay more time was the students' desire to get out of whatever it was that they needed to do at home. In this way, they were strategic about extending their time because it meant less time at home that they would be asked/told to do chores. In this example, Guadalupe shares how she gets out of chores at home as we wrap up the plática and reschedule another one for a later time.

Socorro: You usually get picked up like at 4:30 or 5?

Guadalupe: I get picked up when I want to.

Socorro (laughs): What time is that usually?

Guadalupe: About when school's over. But when there's college class I'm like 'no I'm staying.' I'm not gonna clean, I'm not gonna clean.

Socorro (laughs): Is that what you do when you go home, you have to clean?

Guadalupe: Yeah, or I just sit down, and when they come I pretend I'm sleeping, but I'm actually watching tv you know.

Socorro: Why, cuz you don't want to do chores?

Guadalupe: Yeaaaaah.

Guadalupe's choice to participate in both the college class and even the pláticas reflected not only her wanting to hang out with her friends, but also her strategic moves

to not have to clean at home. As youth occupying multiple spaces and recognizing their limited power against adults in their lives, particularly parents, they often engaged in various strategies that protected their own self-interests. In this case, there was no particular reason that Guadalupe chose not to do chores, other than the fact that she just did not want to do them. As will be discussed later in this chapter, there are other reasons besides interest in the topic that students chose to be in the college class. One reason that I will highlight below is that they often did not want to participate in the school's regular after-school program. For those students who had to wait until a certain time to get picked up, college class was a better option than what they did regularly during the after-school program. The plática below illustrates this, as the girls talk about the recent attendance of two boys that had not been coming all year. Though I had asked them to participate at the beginning of the school year, neither of them showed up until early March. Selena begins by describing why one boy, Ramiro, started attending regularly.

Selena: Cuz everyone started saying that it was cool and all that, so….

Lupita:…we get to chill out….

Socorro:..so he wanted to be in the mix?

Selena: Yeah. And he doesn't want to go to after school.

Lupita: Yup.

Socorro: Why don't people like after school? What happens in after school?

Lupita: Cuz they are so mean to them. And it's boring.

Socorro: Yeah cuz everyone hides in Cinthia's room, huh?

Selena: Yeah.

Socorro: You guys don't stay in after school do you?

Lupita: No (says it as if she is disgusted).

Selena: No.

Both Lupita and Selena recognize why Ramiro and his friend Jose avoid the after-school program when they have an alternative. When we do not meet for college class, they have no other option but to go to the after-school program. Many of the girls who get picked up in the early evening hang out in Cinthia's room, a former Adelante research assistant and now current teacher at Jackson. And whenever Cinthia was not available, they would either go to a friend's house or stay in after-school. Though clearly not all of the staff members in the after-school program were mean people, there were a few personalities who apparently stood out. What is interesting about the students' relationship with the after-school program is that, for the most part, students could do much of what they wanted: have recess, play sports, and watch movies. However, even though they were given some degree of freedom over what they could do, there was something about that particular space that made many of them dislike it.

In this section, I used several vignettes from the pláticas to describe how myself and Sylvia were perceived as nepantla adults, occupying multiple roles both at the same time and also at different times. Conceptualizing my role using nepantla allows me to recognize how I occupied an "in-between" space, in-between friend, family member, and educator (Keating, 2006). Though I embraced these multiple roles, it certainly had its uncomfortable moments. By not seeing me as a "serious teacher" for example, they had fewer filters to hold back their energy as young people.

I also recognized how their relationship with me was impacted by their weighing their other options. On many occasions, hanging out with me and their friends in the

college class was better than going home and doing chores. It was also better than going to the after-school program. I understood their choices as being connected to their realities as fifth-graders, and in particular their age, which limits what they have control over. Yet even in light of these realities, there was clearly something crucial about their describing me as "family." This description speaks to the necessity of relationship development in counterspaces because within these spaces it is important to feel cared for. Authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) within the space proved to be an important factor in determining their continued participation. Over the course of my involvement with Jackson throughout the past 4 years, I have consistently heard students express negative feelings towards the after-school program. The two most common reasons why students did not like being in that program were that the staff were mean to them, and that it was boring. Specifically, students pointed to numerous instances where the staff would yell at them, often according to the students, without reason. Though I never myself participated in the after-school program, I gathered from how students talked about it that if they had other options, they would choose those over being in the after-school program.

Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, and Howard (2013) highlight how caring relationships mattered in their study of a counterspace developed specifically for Black male youth by Black male faculty. With regard to how the students perceived their mentors, they write, "[t]he students characterized the African American men who serve as mentor/instructors in their male academies as caring, concerned, compassionate, and dedicated faculty" (Terry et al., 2013, p. 685). They further link how many of the students in their study equated the Black male faculty to uncles, fathers, and friends. Thus, relationship development is essential to the development of a counterspace, and

specifically relationships that develop over time and shift into various roles. In a similar vein, Revilla (2004) highlights that another characteristic of a muxerista pedagogy is that it, "…takes place in a safe space nurtured by warmth, playfulness, love, and fun" (p. 92). Although as I will demonstrate later, the counterspace with youth was indeed very complex at times, overall, I think the relationships that we were able to develop and nurture were based on warmth, care, and playfulness, and this was due in part to the different ways that students perceived myself and Sylvia. Feeling included and like an integral part of the counterspace is another important aspect of relationship building that I will further examine in the next section.

The Importance of Feeling Included

A key aspect for the students with regard to their participation in the college class revolved around whether or not their friends would also be there. In having some prior understanding of this, I strategically invited students to participate based on their having at least one friend who would also participate. In other words, I did not want any of the students feeling as if they were alone. Initially, many of them chose to participate if they knew their friends would too. Their sustained participation relied in part on their developing relationships with their friends. Thus, the notion of "feeling included" seems to be an integral part of counterspaces, and is connected to what I mentioned above about feeling like someone in that space cares about you. It also partially determines how comfortable students may feel because typically around their friends they express themselves differently. As Sky put it in one of her pláticas, participating in the class, "…is fun to get to do it with [my] friends." In fact, on her college class application

(explaining why she wants to be a part of the class), friends and fun was part of her rationale for wanting to participate. An excerpt from this application is shown below.

> I am interested in joining this class because last year the 6th graders I know went to college class. I asked them about it, and they said it was fun. I also want to join this class because I want to have a fun after school class. In addition, I would like to join this group because I will be with my friends, and we can have a good time in college class.

In many ways, building community with others, and having fun while doing it, proved important to developing our counterspace. The word that students frequently used to summarize and describe the class was "fun." As Revilla (2004) mentions, there needs to be a sense of playfulness and ultimately fun as part of critical pedagogical practice. Though adults are often quick to dismiss a sense of playfulness among youth, and children in particular, as them merely "acting like kids," playfulness has its role within historically marginalized communities, but specifically for women of color (Lugones, 1987). In her 1987 article, Lugones highlights that playfulness, which she defines as an attitude that can "…carry [people] through [an] activity, a playful attitude, [which] turns the activity into play" (p. 16), can only happen within certain "worlds," and in particular "worlds" that are tied to a positionality of oppression. Specifically, Lugones highlights that playfulness is related to a sense of love and being able to connect (and love) across and with/in difference, particularly for women of color. Her theorization of playfulness parallels what Anzaldúa has written about nos/otras, which is the need to recognize ourselves within others as a means of bridging together our worlds.

Though we never explicitly set out to make the class playful, I realized over the course of the year that this playfulness occurred naturally, and was part of our everyday. Having friends within the class allowed students to feel more comfortable and in turn be

more playful, because they felt they could be themselves. An added dimension to this playfulness was the relationship between ourselves and the students, which I highlighted in the previous section (nepantla adults). Though care should be an integral part of developing relationships in counterspaces, I argue here that playfulness has a role within these spaces as well. Specifically, playfulness and feeling included within counterspaces go hand in hand because typically when someone feels included, they feel more comfortable expressing themselves as they are. Furthermore, Lugones (1987) highlights how a sense of playfulness is tied to experiences of oppression, and in her case, she was more playful in spaces with women of color than other types of spaces. Connected to the idea of playfulness among oppressed groups is the notion that comedy and humor have served important roles for the survival of marginalized communities (Amditis, 2013; Carrillo, 2006; Gordon, 1998; Rahman, 2007; Weaver, 2010). For example, Gordon (1998) discusses how the condition of slavery necessitated a need for coping mechanisms among African American slaves, and particularly mechanisms that allowed for not only coping but also healing. In counterspaces where people of color and other marginalized groups come together to challenge dominant discourse, it is not surprising to encounter humor, and explicitly humor which works to subvert domination (Rahman, 2007) is a part of these spaces.

In developing or co-constructing a counterspace, attention should be given to the dynamics of the people within the space. That is, often, some people leave a particular space because they either may not feel included, or on the other end, may feel explicitly excluded because of some aspect of themselves. In Revilla's (2004) work, the Raza Womyn felt the need to develop their own space because their queer identity was

explicitly excluded from other critical spaces on campus, including MEChA. Thus, being aware of the ongoing shift of relationships is key to being mindful of whether or not counterspaces begin to work against themselves, by serving to exclude rather than include.

The next section examines what is already understood about counterspaces: They are sites where dominant discourse is challenged. In this way, this finding was not necessarily novel in relationship to the literature on Critical Race counterspaces. However, I chose to include it briefly because it speaks to the way that counterspaces do serve as sites where those who are historically marginalized can come together to challenge various forms of oppression. Additionally, it highlights the students' perspective on their developing forms of critical consciousness.

Centering Critical Discourse

Critical Race counterspaces are specifically centered on critical discourse that challenges multiple forms of subordination. Thus, this aspect of how this became a part of our counterspace is rather blatantly obvious, but I have chosen to include it here to provide the reader with some insight into the way that young Brown youth were making sense of forms of oppression they had experienced. Although I have mentioned playfulness and fun as tied to the students' desire to participate in the class, they also recognized that the material that we talked about was different than what was in their everyday curriculum, or the after-school program curriculum. As has been described in Chapter 3, the class was designed to examine four central themes throughout the year: race/racism, class inequality, borders, and gender inequality. In large part, the students

expressed interest in the class material and topics because it allowed them to make concrete connections to their own lived experiences. In the plática below, Sky and Rosa discuss why they chose to continue attending the class throughout the year.

Socorro: Ok, so what makes you keep coming [to the class]?

Rosa: Cuz after we settle down, our crazy moments, um….

Sky:…I like crazy moments….

Rosa:..we can actually have a conversation and talk about important stuff that we can't talk about in regular school.

Sky: Yeah because Ms. Peterson never talks about that stuff.

Socorro: So you don't think, because she doesn't want to or like why, why do you guys think you don't talk about that?

Sky: Cuz it's not in the curriculum.

In this example, Sky and Rosa reference "important stuff" to signify the fact that we talk about "controversial topics" during our counterspace, including race, racism, and other political topics that k-12 teachers often feel uncomfortable discussing. What they also demonstrate in this example is that they can tell the difference between the curriculum in the college class and the curriculum during their regular school day. Although many students admitted that they actually like subjects like math and science, they also said that often those topics were presented in "boring" ways that made them not like learning about them as much.

One aspect of the class that was particularly striking was the fact that students frequently talked over one another. In almost every plática, I asked students why they thought their peers (and they) did this. Their responses, which I demonstrate below, I

argue are connected to the ways that school curriculums do not provide platforms for youth, and particularly low income youth of color, to center themselves in meaningful ways (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Cruz, 2013; Yosso, 2002). Thus, they are constantly seeking opportunities to be heard and have their voices and experiences validated.

> Socorro:…but in general whenever we meet like, I feel like you guys always, not like you guys specifically but in general everyone is always trying to compete over like wanting to talk….
>
> Rosa: Yeah.
>
> Sky: Oh yeah.
>
> Socorro: Why do you think that is?
>
> Rosa:..because they want….
>
> Sky:….because they want to express themselves because in class it's like…..
>
> Rosa:…they never get to….
>
> Sky:….blah da blah da blah da (goes on for another few seconds, with a loud enough volume to cover Rosa's comments).
>
> Rosa:…so, so they wanna talk about….
>
> Sky: (says something inaudible but makes it hard to hear Rosa)
>
> Rosa:..because they know it's a safe environment to talk about stuff…
>
> Sky:..and it's not like schooling.
>
> Rosa: Yeah.
>
> Socorro: What do you mean by schooling?
>
> Sky: Like it's not like….
>
> Rosa:…curriculum.

Sky: Yeah, what she said like writing, or math, or science. Actually, all the kids in our class like science.

Socorro: But don't you guys like some of that stuff?

Sky: Um, sometimes.

Socorro: Maybe it's just the way that it's done is not the best?

Rosa: Yeah.

Sky: Yeah, like my mom….

Rosa:…but like in science we never get to talk about the topics that we talk about in college class (last two words inaudible)….

Sky:…in Mrs. Barnett's class we went outside, and then we played and we looked around and stuff. But in Ms. Peterson's….

Rosa:…in writing….

Sky: (makes loud blah blah noises, mimicking earlier noises she made in reference to her teacher)

Rosa: In writing you can talk about those topics but it's not in the curriculum for SAGE (annual testing) so then we never do it.

Sky: Imagine it is in the SAGE, that would be so awkward.

Both Rosa and Sky identify the curriculum as restricting and different from the topics that we discussed in our after school space. Though they enjoyed learning about subjects such as science, they understood that none of their usual school subjects, with the exception of writing, delved into any discussions on broader society. Rosa also mentions that the college class "is a safe environment" where students can discuss topics like race and gender inequality. Her comment illuminates how students recognize the boundaries of the

multiple spaces they occupy, and in this case her fifth-grade classroom. Citing their annual testing procedures (SAGE) as one major reason why their classroom topics are limited to particular boundaries, both Rosa and Sky demonstrate their participation in the class was fueled by them wanting to learn more about "other stuff," specifically various forms of inequality.

Much of the literature on counterspaces suggests that these spaces can serve as a refuge from other hostile environments, particularly as it pertains to the experiences of underrepresented students in schooling institutions (Nuñez, 2011; Revilla, 2004; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Terry et al., 2013). In many ways, the experiences of the Latin@ youth whom I worked with were no different in this sense. Recognizing that they could engage with material that reflected more aspects of their lives than their traditional classroom, the majority of the students who participated in the class remained consistent all year. In addition, throughout the pláticas was a sense that the college class was a different type of space from other spaces at their school. I mentioned this in the previous section, when I discussed how some students attended the college class because they wanted to avoid other spaces at school where they felt mistreated (e.g., the after-school program). In this way, it seemed that they valued these differences and recognized that other spaces might even make the conversations "awkward." In the example above, Sky states that if the college class material were in the SAGE, it "would be so awkward." I interpret her comment as meaning that she understood that the topics in college class were better discussed in environments like the college class, rather than other spaces where the relationships between the teachers and students are more rigid. As has been mentioned throughout this chapter, students often perceived their fifth-grade teacher as

being less “creative” in her teaching style and approach. She was also, as the students mention below, not direct when it came to the topic of discussing ethnic identity in class. In the excerpt below, I ask students if they think that their peers know what their ethnic background is.

Samantha: I think people that go here that don’t know what they are, I think they learn it when they come here because like there’s (short pause), at school they talk more about it.

Socorro: So you think people learn it maybe in school?

Samantha: Yes.

Socorro: Do you guys talk about your identity in school?

Sky: Uh, not really.

Samantha: Kinda.

Rosa: Only in college class.

Samantha: Yeah.

Sky: Only in Adelante.

Socorro: Really?

Samantha: Yeah and that’s what helped us.

Socorro: Like in Ms. Peterson’s class for example, since you guys are all in that class, do you guys ever talk about your identity?

Sky: No….

Rosa:…no, well….

Sky:..well sometimes like in social studies….

Rosa:..yeah.

Samantha: But it's like not straight forward….

Sky:..it's not like the same thing.

Samantha: Yeah, it's like kinda (pauses)…like we don't talk about it straight, we just…

Sky:..like…..

Socorro:…like you talk around it kind of?

All of them: yeah!

Sky: Like in all subjects.

Sky, Rosa, and Samantha are all in agreement about their fifth-grade teacher not talking directly about topics related to race and ethnic identity. Though they encountered these topics to a greater degree in social studies than other subjects, they recognize, as Samantha puts it, they "don't talk about it straight." Initially, when I ask them if they do talk at all about ethnic identity in school, Samantha says "yes," but then it becomes clear that she is really mostly referencing the college class. Though ethnic identity is an important affirmation of who students are and where they come from, these youth are not getting this type of affirmation from their fifth-grade classroom. In this way, counterspaces can serve as that space where these discourses are brought to the center, rather than discussed in roundabout ways, if at all. In the relationships that I had developed with students prior to their participating in the college class, I knew that they were not getting sufficient exposure to culturally relevant material that would allow them to self-reflect in various, critical ways. As these pláticas reveal, students recognized the difference between traditional curriculum and "college class curriculum." In seeking a space where they could talk about themselves in more direct ways, the college class

provided them an outlet. Even as young Brown youth, the students were able to identify topics that they considered "important" to understanding who they are, and continually expressed interest in engaging with those topics.

In the following section, I examine another reason why the counterspace proved to be a unique space in comparison to other spaces at school: Students were allowed to express themselves in multiple ways. These multiple opportunities for self-expression proved important for young Brown youth who consistently navigated and pushed back on boundaries.

Embracing Multiple Forms of Self-Expression

As young Brown youth who possess much creative energy, sitting in a chair for long periods of time throughout the day is difficult for them to do. Though teachers often have little control over what they must cover in a given day, they have more control over how they can go about covering it. As I mentioned in the previous section, Sky enjoyed Ms. Barnett's class because her teaching style was more varied. Her example of this was their going outside to study science rather than only sitting inside a classroom to read about it. For this reason, we incorporated multiple teaching tools in the after school class, including activities such as drawing, writing, discussion, acting something out, and our final project, making an individual digital video.

I discuss embracing multiple forms of self-expression in my data as a two-pronged process. The first part of this process is a pedagogical style that can incorporate the multiple talents of participants, and in this case, students. As I describe above, we presented different activities throughout the year so that we could diversify what the

students did as classwork. The second part of this process was that we did not shame students for expressing themselves in different ways. In other words, rather than hold pre-constructed notions of who students were, we allowed them to shift their multiple identities and roles. An example of this would be a student who is traditionally viewed as "quiet" during the regular school day, but is much more expressive and talkative during college class. Both aspects of this process worked together within our counterspace. Through varying the activities we did with students, we had the opportunity to learn more about them and what they enjoyed doing the most. Additionally, not shaming students for how they presented themselves allowed them to feel more comfortable being who they felt themselves to be.

Having the opportunity to "act things out" for students seemed particularly fun, perhaps because it was the most distant activity from what they would do in their fifth-grade classroom. On one occasion, three girls developed their own script related to bullying that included a solution for how the bullying situation could be handled. Their script development came some weeks after we had done an activity in class where the students had to pick a particular problem or issue they encountered in school, and then perform a resolution they had to address that problem. The first time we did this activity, a group of girls wanted to perform how their interactions with boys in school go, and how they wish they would go. Josefina then later wrote a script with Guadalupe, and then they both acted out the script with Guadalupe's younger sister. Incorporating various activities where students could physically move seemed important, especially because of the way that their bodies are regulated throughout the school day. One simple thing they enjoyed

was getting a chance to sit next to who they wanted, rather than the assigned seating that they had in class.

Embracing the different ways that students chose to express themselves in our counterspace was important, but not easy. In fact, it proved to be very challenging because on several occasions, it necessitated that we change our agenda for the day. For example, on days when students had just come from a field trip, their focus was on the field trip. This included everything from what the field trip was about, to other things that they might have found funny or memorable, such as a classmate saying something at a certain time or one of their classmates falling on the floor. Thus, the energy of the students varied widely. Although most of them were almost always fairly energetic, this energy would fluctuate as a result of whatever else was going on in their day. Part of what I mean by embracing the multiple forms of self-expression that students have is being flexible enough to have a change of plans based on where the students are at. The vignette that I provide below is an example of how this looked in practice. On this particular day, only girls showed up. Additionally, the students had just come back from a science field trip. Though I begin first with picking up where the class had previously left off the last time we met, I realize quickly that their interest in the topic begins to dwindle. We start with talking about ethnic identity and specifically what composes a "Mexican" identity.

Rosa: It's like, my parents told me that it's like Azteca and…..

Sara: Mayo!

Socorro: What is Azteca?

Lupita: The Mayans?

Socorro: What is that? Or who is that? Does anybody know?

Students: no

Socorro: I ask you guys this question because do you guys know what you are?

Sara: Ooooooooo (says this in a tone of voice as if she is intrigued by the question, but purposely trying to demonstrate her intrigue).

Selena: No.

Guadalupe: I'm Chicana.

Socorro: So for those of you who identify as some form of Chicano, or Latino or even other groups….

Belinda: I'm Latino….

Socorro:….you guys are all part indigenous.

Sara: You know what my aunt said?.....

Belinda: What's indigenous? ….

Socorro:…that's a great question!

Sara:…that she likes Argentinos because they are so cuuuutte! (starts laughing as she says this) .

Socorro: Yeah, what's indigenous? (addressing Sara as she starts busting out laughing). Ok guys, I know you guys had a lot of ice cream but let's focus.

Sara: (keeps laughing even louder, and starts hitting her hand on the table. Some of the other girls in the room start joining in on her laughter. This makes Sara start laughing even louder).

Belinda: I think you guys had too much fun for one day.

Socorro: Too much ice cream (as I start to chuckle in a low voice).

Sara: Too much cooookie! (still laughing as she says this).

Belinda: What?

Lupita: What is Emma doing here?

Sara (referring to her ice cream): Y'all better get your hands off this beauty! Sorry (she says to me).

Socorro: No, you're fine. I'll give you guys early free time because I can see that you guys had a lot of sugar.

Sara: (starts laughing again loudly while some of the other girls join her).

Socorro: Ok. But you guys are all one, some part of you is indigenous, right?

Rosa: Which means?

Belinda: What's indigenous?

Sara: I was gonna spit on Rosa (still recovering from her previous laugh attack).

Rosa: Ewwwww!

Sara: Sorry I didn't mean it.

Rosa: Ugghhhh

Sara: That's scary, I know. (after she says this, starts bursting out in laughter once again, this time other girls are laughing loudly also).

Belinda: Ok! Ok can we talk about science a bit?

Socorro: Ok, tell me about science.

Belinda: Ok. So today on the field trip…..

Sara: (gasps loudly) The field trip was so fun!!!

In the example above, it is clear that although I had a particular agenda for that day, I was unable to successfully get through it. I had planned to talk about Mexican

identity being tied historically to indigeneity and how that identity has changed over time. I specifically wanted to highlight the word "indigenous" itself because many of the students were not familiar with it. However, as demonstrated above, though there was some interest in the topic, it was clear that discussing Mexican identity on that particular day was not going to be as useful or productive of a conversation. Though the students were not necessarily being disrespectful, they clearly had other, more salient issues on their mind. Belinda makes this clear when she asks, "can we talk about science a bit."

Sara, who is normally very talkative during class and participates, was participating on that day but not in the way that she usually does. That day she was eating ice cream that she brought from an ice cream party that the after-school program had and was more rambunctious than she typically is. Though I could have reprimanded her behavior more, it was Belinda and not Sara who wanted to switch the subject. At that moment, I viewed Belinda's question as their not necessarily having a disinterest in learning about identity altogether, but rather that their attention was somewhere else. In trying to be flexible, and embrace the way that they were expressing themselves that day, which was more energetic than usual, I allowed the conversation to go where they wanted it go. During the rest of our class discussion, we did not return to the topic of Mexican identity. That is not to say the conversation was not "useful." In fact, as I will discuss in the next chapter, that same conversation which initially started with the field trip ended up leading us to a discussion about the frequent tensions between themselves and the boys in their fifth-grade classroom.

I provide the above vignette as an example of the way that I had to be flexible with them within our space. Though I recognize that teacher educators do not always

have this same flexibility, I still think it is nonetheless important to gauge how students may feel on a particular day to discuss certain topics. For the purposes of co-constructing a counterspace specifically, I found that being in tune with where students are at emotionally proved to be a useful endeavor, rather than always pushing my own agenda. Given that counterspaces often function within hostile environments, this strategy may be all the more important because of the experiences and emotions that people may bring with them into the space. Thus, "checking in" with people and embracing what they may be feeling at that moment could present itself as a greater opportunity for transformation than ignoring their realities (Anzaldúa, 2002). Furthermore, as Revilla (2004) highlights, part of a muxerista pedagogical approach is "[a]ddressing the holistic needs of Chicana/Latina/o communities, including females and males" (p. 83). In the example above, I interpret holistic needs to include their desire to talk about what had just happened in their day. Given that it had particular relevance to *them,* I felt that ignoring their need to discuss it or debrief about it would have not acknowledged part of their holistic needs.

Another example of embracing multiple forms of self-expression that I examine here is specifically related to how some of the boys in the class represented themselves. As I have mentioned, the class was composed mostly of girls. However, at one point in time, we had four boys attending regularly. For the final digital project, students were asked to write a narrative about themselves, how they described themselves, what they might identify with, and characteristics that make them who they are. We showed the students an example from a sixth-grader who had completed the project the year before. Using her example as a guide, students interpreted this assignment in slightly different

ways. For the most part however, they used it as an opportunity to tell others who they were.

Below, I share the digital project narrative texts that were written by two boys. I reproduce what they said in their audio because I do not have the original copy of the text they wrote. All of the boys who participated were friends with each other and shared ideas with one another as they worked on this project.

> Jose: I am Jose. I am a boy. I am funny, I am nasty. I am good at soccer. I am ten years old. I am from Dallas, Texas. I am the oldest one in my family. I want to be an architect when I grow up or a soccer player. I have two brothers, I don't have any sisters. I like soccer. My parents are from Guanajuato, Mexico. My brothers are both from here. I like playing with my brothers and friends. I like running. I like messing with my little brother. I mess around a lot. I am described as a good friend. I've been in Jackson since Kindergarten. I was born on August 23rd, 2004. I had surgery when I was little.

> Gonzalo: My name is Gonzalo. I am a person. I like saying 'YOLO' and 'LOL'. I am a Mexican. My favorite game is Minecraft. I like playing Black Ops 2 and Black Ops 3 and Advanced Warfare. I have curly hair. I am a male. My favorite sport is soccer. My favorite soccer player is Cristiano Ronaldo. I have a playstation 3, I have an Xbox 360. I like tv. I go to Mexico every year. I hate some girls. I am 11 years old. I have brown hair. I go to Jackson Elementary. I am crazy and I'm always so hyper. I have no manners. I don't like school. I want to be a video game designer. I am nasty. I like tv. I wanna go to college.

In both of these examples, Jose and Gonzalo describe themselves as "nasty." They do not elaborate on what this means in their project, but it appears that they have a shared definition of what that means for them, and decided to include it. Gonzalo also calls himself "crazy" and says that he has "no manners." In his digital project video, he laughs when he says this part out loud. The other characteristics they use to describe themselves revolve around video games, soccer, and where their families are from.

I specifically highlight these two examples because of their choice to describe themselves as "nasty." Even though they do not define "nasty" in their video, my

suspicion about how they are using it comes from the various pláticas that I had with the girls. Specifically, whenever the girls talked about the boys being "nasty" in their fifth-grade class, they were referring to sexually inappropriate behavior. One example that the girls shared to talk about the boys being "nasty" was them putting two toy frogs together, one on top of the other, and making "moaning noises." Thus, I used the examples that the girls gave me in how they described the boys as "nasty," to interpret how they were using it for their own presentations. Because of that, I understood them as using "nasty" to describe themselves in their project, in part because they knew they would not "get in trouble" for saying it. In other words, because we made our best attempts to not shame students for how they viewed themselves, both Gonzalo and Jose felt comfortable enough to call themselves "nasty" in their digital projects, which they ended up sharing with their peers. Gonzalo even goes as far as saying he has "no manners" recognizing and internalizing himself as someone who frequently is disciplined. Particularly during his fifth-grade classroom, and even during our own after school space, Gonzalo was someone who liked to instigate. He often took up the persona of the "cool kid" who was disinterested in school, even though he worried about his grades and mentioned in his project that he wants to go to college. Part of how Gonzalo expressed his persona relied on the politics of masculinity and "coolness," which I will explore in further detail in the next chapter (hooks, 2004).

What I believe both Jose and Gonzalo's digital narratives demonstrate is the way they make sense of themselves and navigate multiple spaces. Though arguably calling themselves "nasty" is not something they would do in their regular classroom, it was still a part of how they viewed themselves within the college class. In counterspaces, it is

important to allow students, or people, to come as they are. Anzaldúa's scholarship, particularly her earlier work in *Borderlands,* helped me make sense of the importance of allowing people to bring their whole selves into various spaces. Although the idea of always carrying one's multiple selves with them wherever they go (like a turtle) is embedded throughout Anzaldúa's writing, I specifically highlight mestiza consciousness here to illustrate why keeping our whole (multiple) selves intact matters. I am not using mestiza consciousness necessarily to suggest or analyze the boys' digital narratives as an example of *their* developing mestiza consciousness. Rather, I utilize mestiza consciousness to point to a specific part in her writing where Anzaldúa stresses the need to recognize and incorporate our whole selves across the different spaces that we enter and occupy. Anzaldúa refers to her whole self as more of a multiplicity of selves, or multiple selves, that compose the whole. She writes about how her multiple selves (or whole self) is often rejected in different spaces, including her home space. For example, Anzaldúa (2007) highlights how her queer identity is rejected in woman or feminist spaces, and how her feminist identity is rejected in cultural and racial/ethnic spaces. Speaking specifically about the competing nature of her multiple positionalities, and the spaces which frequently force her to choose one over all the others, Anzaldúa (2007) writes,

> …*la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to? (p. 100)

Anzaldúa describes herself as a mestiza with multiple ties to the different positionalities that she embodies. However, rather than having these multiple positionalities (or whole

self) embraced, she writes that she is often torn, or forced to separate these ways of knowing from each other as if they actually can function separately. She argues that the importance of allowing someone to be as they are (embrace their multiple positionalities) is related to their development of (and ongoing) consciousness. This is why Anzaldúa argues that a mestiza consciousness derives from multiple ways of knowing and being in the world that are fused together, rather than made separate.

Drawing from this aspect of Anzaldúa's work, I argue that counterspaces should strive to include the whole (and multiple) selves of the people in them. Jose and Gonzalo's digital narratives demonstrated how they were proudly affirming a view of themselves that they know would otherwise be reprimanded in their regular classroom. That is, they are aware of the implications of calling themselves "nasty" or Gonzalo saying he has "no manners." They recognize these constructions of youth of their age group are not acceptable at school. However, in our college class space where they knew that boundaries could be pushed and extended, both Jose and Gonzalo affirm themselves as "nasty." Gonzalo also affirms the constructions of himself as having "no manners," and as being "crazy" and "hyper." All of these traits (nasty, crazy, and hyper), I would argue, are characteristics that their teachers would view as negative, or undesirable. In the college class space, the boys resist this undesirability by proudly affirming these traits and claiming them to describe themselves. I argue that they felt comfortable doing this in large part because neither myself nor Sylvia shamed them for taking up those discourses in their digital narratives. In this way, the boys included aspects of how they viewed themselves in their digital projects that they might have otherwise had to leave at the door in other spaces.

In this section where I have examined the process of embracing multiple forms of self-expression, I highlighted it as a two-part process that both incorporates multiple mediums for self-expression such as writing, drawing, acting something out, and digital media, as well as the ability to be open to how students may choose to express themselves. In general, the approach of embracing these multiple forms of self-expression requires flexibility and openness to that which we do not know or may not understand. I argue that Anzaldúa's conceptualizations of mestiza consciousness, specifically how she views the need for different spaces to recognize our whole and multiple selves, is a useful tool for making sense of this openness. Without this openness, I argue, counterspaces run the very real risk of ostracizing people based on how they may present themselves, or based on a particular or specific identity they embody. As Flores and Garcia (2009) demonstrate, frequent points of contention in the Latina counterspace they helped develop as a result of a hostile university climate, were about the very notions of what is a "Latina" identity. Thus, if counterspaces operate under rigid constructions of "what is" and "what is not," they can start to operate in ways that may undermine the purpose of the space to begin with. Recognizing how often youth of color are regulated in schools daily, we had to engage in the work of allowing students to bring their multiple selves into the college class if we wanted to co-create a space that was different.

In the final section of this chapter, I examine the more intricate process of working to better understand one another within our counterspace and the nepantla space that we frequently found ourselves in. This work proved to be difficult not only because it presented a feeling of venturing into the "unknown," but also because we often

mistakenly believe or assume that if a person has shifted their consciousness, they *will not* be lured back into the "master's house" (Lorde, 2012) to reproduce his discourse.

Embracing the Tension of Contradiction

> Often student activists engage in meaningful acts of pedagogy during which their collective actions and conversations lead to a raised critical consciousness as they dialogue during meetings, at protests, vigils, conferences, and community events (Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003). Many of us who consider ourselves activists and who have had the experience of raising our racial, class, gender, and/or sexual consciousness, for example, are very familiar with these experiences. They become part of our identities and epistemologies. We sometimes forget how detailed and intricate the experience was and continues to be. (Revilla, 2004, p. 80)

I begin this section of the chapter with the above quote because I believe that it accurately captures the complexities and tensions that I felt within the counterspace. Specifically, the part that I will highlight from this quote is when Revilla writes, "we sometimes forget how detailed and intricate the experience was and continues to be." I found this statement to be true of my own experiences in co-developing a counterspace with Latin@ youth. Though I was not under the impression that co-developing this counterspace would be a seamless process, I also could not foresee what the process itself would truly entail. This is in part due to the fact that, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, much of the literature that examines or utilizes the specific terminology of "counterspace," highlights these spaces as being "safe havens," more than it acknowledges the pain that is often a part of the spaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Nuñez, 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Terry et al., 2013). The other reason I could not foresee what this would look like with elementary Latin@ youth is because of the lack of

research that utilizes CRT praxis, and Anzaldúan (Borderlands) praxis with elementary youth of color.

Embracing the tension of contradiction, I argue, is an essential and nearly unavoidable component of developing a Critical Race counterspace. For this particular finding, I utilize nepantla to examine counterspaces as shifting, nonstatic spaces that can benefit from being remade and reimagined. In arguing that counterspaces are filled with contradiction, I acknowledge that deficit discourse can and will be reproduced within counterspaces. This point should not diminish the value that counterspaces can offer. Rather, it should serve as a reminder of the ways that we are all inescapably complicit within a colonial system and critical consciousness is an ever, and on-going process (Anzaldúa, 2002; hooks, 2003; Revilla, 2004).

For this particular finding, I highlight the way gender contributed to a divide between the boys and girls in the class. I will only provide a brief example in this section, because I will substantially elaborate on the role that gender played within the college class in the next chapter. In fact, much of what I have included here in this section could easily be incorporated into the next chapter. However, I have chosen to discuss it here and in relationship to the process of co-developing a counterspace because I feel that it is a part of counterspaces that goes highly overlooked. In choosing to center this particular aspect of Critical Race counterspaces, my aim is to push the discussions and theorizations of counterspaces further than where they currently stand.

In the example that I provide below, I combine two excerpts from different class days to illustrate how the boys, even though we would talk explicitly about ways that men (and boys) are broadly stereotyped (including for example how they are not

supposed to cry or show emotion) continually fell into the trope of frequently misbehaving. One boy who was mentioned previously, Gonzalo, was particularly infamous for getting in trouble and steering other boys to follow his lead. The first part of this vignette begins with a conversation about feminism that we had where many of the girls and all of the boys were present. In the first excerpt, I share some examples of how students were responding to a 2-minute snippet of a longer 30-minute Ted Talk by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie called "We Should all be Feminists." The second part then illustrates how, at a later time, Gonzalo fell into the very stereotype that he himself disagreed with.

April 6th, 2015

Socorro: Ok, does somebody want to tell me, what was she talking about here? (in reference to the Ted Talk clip)

(students saying "oooo" loudly)

Socorro: Jose you have your hand raised and I don't really get to hear from you. Go ahead.

Jose: Um, she's talking about cuz like it's boys that um….their teacher, whoever gets a thingamajigger, gives the students the test, and um whoever gets the highest scores gets to be a monitor….

Gonzalo:…a class monitor….

Jose:…a class monitor, but she [the teacher] didn't say it was supposed to be a boy, so she [Chimamanda] tried her best and she [the teacher] just gave it away to

a boy. It was um, I don't know her name, the boy was second on the best test score…

Socorro:..ok, so she [Chimamanda] should have gotten it.

Jose: Yeah.

Socorro: But she didn't. Ok….

Rosa:…yeah just because of her gender.

Socorro: So there's a stereotype right, since we talked about stereotypes, that boys are leaders and girls are not. Yeah, Lupita?

Lupita: And now Ms. Peterson she does the opposite, that um girls are…

Rosa:…stronger than the boys…

Lupita:…no, smarter.

Rosa: Yeah.

Socorro: Anyone else? Yeah, Max?

Max: Um, what's it called. Some kids have been saying that um most of the girls have been student of the month, and the what's it called….

Gonzalo:…boys haven't….

Max:…yeah, like only two boys have been student of the month. And then the boys they like get jealous.

Socorro: So a stereotype, and you're right, a stereotype about boys is that they misbehave all the time.

Gonzalo: No we don't!

Socorro: A *stereotype* (with emphasis on the word stereotype).

April 15th, 2015

Sylvia: How do people think about y'all as young people? Do you think people think that you're crazy…..

Samantha:…yes!

Socorro: Do people think that you guys have an opinion?

Sky: Yes! Wait no. Well sometimes they don't give us an opinion.

Sylvia: But really you're smart, you know a lot of stuff….(overhead intercom comes on, calling a student down to the office)….

Gonzalo: Be quiet! (shouting to the intercom)

Sky: We knew more than our parents….

Gonzalo: (talking to Sky) no one cares….

Sky:….shhh!!!! (talking back to Gonzalo)….

Gonzalo:….no one cares….

Sky:…when they went to school because….

Gonzalo:…no one cares….

Sky: (raising her voice)….shuush!

Socorro: (to Sky), Go ahead.

Gonzalo:…no one cares….

Sky:..will you stop interrupting me!?

Socorro: Just ignore him, go ahead.

Sky: You know what and he's laughing….

Socorro:..I know because he's getting to you go ahead….

In juxtaposing these two excerpts, my goal is to demonstrate the way deficit and dominant discourse becomes reproduced, even by my own actions. Jose, who does not participate as much during the larger group discussion as others, was one of the first to raise his hand and respond. Though we had talked about gender stereotypes and inequality prior to that day in April, it was one of the first times we were explicitly talking about the word "feminist." The students are quick to point out how their fifth-grade teacher uses gender as a marker of "being smart." They also draw a connection between what their teacher says, and the actual results of who gets to be student of the month each month. In acknowledging Max's comment, I say that a stereotype about boys is that they misbehave often, to which Gonzalo immediately responds with an indignant, "no we don't!" I clarify that this is a stereotype, but this interaction is nonetheless interesting given that Gonzalo gets into trouble frequently.

The second vignette, which takes place nine days after the first, highlights how Gonzalo engages in the very behavior he claims are not true of boys. He consistently keeps interrupting Sky as she makes her comment, to the point where Sky addresses him directly because it bothers her so much. My own pedagogical actions in this scenario also reproduced what teachers in a traditional k-12 classroom often do—I told Sky to ignore Gonzalo when I should have made him accountable to his own actions. Even in the moment that it happened, I knew that I was working against what I believed about ensuring that students are respectful at all times. During this particular instance, I failed to adequately address Gonzalo's rude behavior. When I reflected on this scenario, I realized that I felt pressure in trying to work against always disciplining the boys in the room, especially in light of the discussion we had just had and how Gonzalo was adamant

about challenging that stereotype about boys. In other words, Gonzalo fell into the trope of always misbehaving and I fell into the trope of teacher who does not care because I suggested that Sky ignore him, instead of actually disciplining him. I struggled pedagogically and even philosophically between disciplining Gonzalo (which I did not do in that moment) and not disciplining him (which only served to upset the girls and Sky because they were used to this in their fifth-grade classroom).

In sharing these two instances my goal is demonstrate the messiness of the contradictions we often must come to embrace in counterspaces. This is not to say these contradictions should not be challenged. I initially felt embarrassed when I reflected on this instance and on my own actions. I knew what I was trying to do pedagogically to be different from their "traditional teachers," but even knowing that did not stop me from making mistakes. Gonzalo challenged me directly when I made my comment about the stereotype of boys frequently misbehaving. But that also did not stop him from his own actions of interrupting and being rude to his classmate Sky, and proving the very point he sought to challenge. These types of interactions happened on more than one occasion in our counterspace. The first time, I was really disappointed in myself. The second time I began to question if the counterspace was countering anything at all. As the year progressed and as I continued reading Chicana feminist literature, I began to realize that the moments of tension, contradiction, and messiness were potential sites for transformation. Rather than have the expectation that students would walk away from this experience as "radicals," which can be unrealistic because of their material realities (Tuck & Yang, 2011), I learned to identify moments of transformation, even if they were only in that moment. For example, in hearing how the girls wanted to participate in the

college class because they recognized the curriculum as different and as "more interesting" than their traditional classroom, I felt validated in my efforts to explicitly center critical discourse in our counterspace. Though they did not themselves use the word "critical discourse," it was clear from our conversation that they were talking about topics such as race and gender, both of which were relevant to their lives as young Brown girls. These moments of transformation helped me make sense of the impact that the counterspace had for them, despite the tensions and contradictions that we experienced within that space (I will say more about this in Chapter 5).

I was only able to view the counterspace from this perspective when I used nepantla as the analytical tool to make sense of my data. Using nepantla allowed me to understand the moments of tension as leaving room for growth. I came to the understanding that nepantla allowed us to sit with the tension, try to make sense of it, and use it as a way to continue developing our consciousness. But it only did this if we kept actively engaging in the process. In other words, though nepantla allowed me to make sense of the way dominant discourse was being reproduced within the college class, it did not mean that this discourse should go unchallenged, or worse yet, unnoticed. Rather, it demonstrated to me, that because this discourse was going to make its way into the college class, like a gas seeping in, it had to be actively sought out and actively challenged. In this way, I argue that counterspaces are inherently spaces of contradiction. Although they do provide many tangible and real benefits for the people who participate in them, these benefits should not be taken as a given. Counterspaces require continual reflection, reimagination and even reshaping as they are often spaces where points of contention frequently scrape against each other.

In this section, I have shared my findings regarding what I believe to be the contradictions that are inherent in counterspaces. Though experiencing these contradictions can potentially leave one in a painful Coatlicue state—that state of despair and hopelessness related to a process of shifting consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2002), they can and should be embraced as moments that can lead to transformation. When working to challenge dominant and deficit discourses in counterspaces, people within that counterspace will have varying levels and degrees of consciousness. There should be something in place that can help people develop and grow within that counterspace, in ways that do not shame. A muxerista pedagogical framework is one way this can be done because as Revilla (2004) states, this framework, "creates mentoring and novice relationships and respects the different levels of consciousness of the participants" (p. 92). Though I shared a glimpse of what the contradictions were in our counterspace with regards to gender, the next chapter explicitly centers these tensions as a result of the varying and changing levels of consciousness of the students within the college class.

In this chapter I sought to address my first two research questions: 1) what is the process of co-constructing a Chican@ studies counterspace for/with fifth-grade Latin@ students, and 2) what types of relationships and interactions are present within this Chican@ studies counterspace? In analyzing the data, my findings pointed to four major components of co-developing a counterspace: relationship building, centering critical discourse, embracing multiple forms of self-expression, and embracing the tension of contradiction. These four components illuminate how counterspaces are important and vital to communities of color, but are filled with tension and contradictions. As a result of this research project, I have to come reconceptualize the definition of counterspaces

offered by Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000). Specifically, I redefine counterspaces as: dynamic sites where people on the margins engage with one another in critical discourse, bring their whole (and multiple) selves, challenge each other, and make sense of the multitude of contradictions they embody, which are always present, as a means of undergoing moments of transformation.

For elementary aged Latin@ youth with limited opportunities at school to critically discuss topics such as race, our after school counterspace provided a much needed platform to center these discussions. The last chapter examines in more detail the implications of co-developing counterspaces with young Brown youth. In the next chapter, I specifically examine the more "mirco" dynamics of relationships within counterspaces, particularly as it pertains to how these youth engaged in processes of critical dialogue and self-reflection within the college class.

CHAPTER 5

MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS IN NEPANTLA: THE ROLE OF SHIFTING CONSCIOUSNESS

In the previous chapter, I detailed my findings as they related to understanding how we co-developed and co-constructed a Critical Race counterspace at Jackson Elementary. The elements that I examined as being part of this co-construction were in many ways specific to the Latin@ elementary youth who were a part of the study, but can also be extended and theorized beyond this age group. Specifically in the previous chapter, I highlighted how relationship building was an integral part of co-developing the counterspace. The shifting relationships that occurred within that space largely impacted its dynamic. In Chapter 4, I sought to address my first two research questions related to the co-construction of the counterspace. In this chapter, I seek to narrow my focus on examining the relationship development aspect of the counterspace, addressing my third research question: how do fifth-grade Latin@ students engage in critical dialogue and self-reflection within our counterspace?

The previous chapter allowed me to speak in broader terms when it came to understanding relationship development. This chapter allows me to get into the specifics of how relationship development happened within the space, and how it was connected to the critical discourse we took up all year. In particular, the girls and boys within the

counterspace shared an ongoing, tenuous relationship that persisted throughout the school year. At different points in time, this relationship worsened. Gender inequality was part of our curricular agenda and over time it became clear that this topic was both the most salient and the most interesting for the girls in the college class.

I argue in this chapter that the girls in the class, who comprised the majority, engaged in critical dialogue and a self-reflection process that further strained their relationship with boys in both the college class, as well as during their fifth-grade classroom. As the girls continued to develop their consciousness around gender inequality, they engaged in specific behaviors that often challenged their male counterparts to think critically about gender. Though the girls recognized the limitations that they encountered in substantially changing their relationships with boys in school, they nonetheless felt it was important for them to vocalize the unfair treatment they experienced.

This chapter examines the trajectory over time of the girls and the conversations that they wanted to have about gender. It culminates with examining how they eventually felt the need to speak to the vice principal about their concerns with boys. In understanding how the girls made sense of their developing consciousness around gender, I specifically draw from points of Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento (2002). The path of conocimiento allowed me to examine these points of consciousness that the girls engaged in as they reflected on gender. I focus primarily on this process as experienced by the girls because they were the majority in the college class. I also focus on their process because on several occasions, when none of the boys were in attendance, they would guide the conversation to revolve around the gendered issues in school that they

encountered. I also, however, examine some of the boys' behavior in relationship to the politics of masculinity and the gender performance that they often engaged in (hooks, 2004). As boys who were getting older and entering early points of puberty, the pressure for them to "act like men" and follow the lead of other boys who were "cool" in a stereotypically masculine way increased. Using primarily the scholarship of bell hooks to make sense of these gendered performances, I offer an analysis of how the boys' behavior reflected their understanding of a social position tied to being and performing "maleness."

What I believe the data and analysis in this chapter can help illuminate are the complex ways that young people, particularly young girls, continuously engaged in a process of their own consciousness development. In many ways, their experiences and struggles with their developing consciousness around the topic of gender reflect the sentiment of women of color scholars, writers, and activists who have felt excluded from certain spaces by their fellow brothers of color (Anzaldúa, 2002; hooks, 2004; Lorde, 2012; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Revilla, 2004; 2012). In this way, their experiences are not entirely surprising. The counterspace that we co-developed, however, often became a space where the girls could vent, debrief, and dialogue about the ways they wanted to re-imagine their relationship with boys. But as I have previously mentioned in the last chapter, our counterspace was not without its many contradictions and limitations. So although the counterspace provided a platform for the girls to be more vocal about the strained relationship they had with boys, it did not necessarily always provide easy answers or solutions to what they were going through. The ongoing experience and complexities associated with developing consciousness, particularly in this case as it

relates to gender for the girls in the college class, is what I hope to make clear throughout this chapter.

Making Room for "Theories in the Flesh"

The college class was a space where I could further develop the already existing relationships I had with the youth who participated. As I have said in Chapter 3, one criterion for selecting students was based on the fact that I had already known them for 3 years. What I came to realize was that the college class allowed me to learn more about the lives of these students, particularly because the topics we discussed in this class were somewhat different from what they would discuss during the regular school day. As a result, I was able to learn more about the embodied knowledges around oppression that students possessed (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006). I particularly learned more about how the girls were developing their consciousness regarding gender inequality and sexism.

Drawing from the work of Chicana feminisms primarily, but also the scholarship of feminists of color more broadly speaking, I argue here that the girls were in different points of developing consciousness about gender inequality. From my analysis of the multiple forms of data that I had collected, I understood the girls as undergoing a process of making sense of how their relationships with boys were often hindered by sexism. I recognized their comments during our conversations as in part drawing from their "theories in the flesh" as young Brown girls navigating spaces where they constantly had to negotiate their relationships with boys. Feminists of color, and particularly queer

feminists of color have argued that "theories in the flesh" are a "politic born out of necessity," where women of color "attempt to bridge the contradictions in [their] experience" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 23). For the girls in the college class, I argue their experiences were parallel to what Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983) write about the contradiction of feminisms in racial equity social movements, "[w]e are the feminists among the people of our culture" (p. 23). Specifically, here the authors of *This Bridge Called my Back* reference and name their experience of being ostracized from broader social movements about racial inequality because of their positionality as women, as female. In a similar vein but without naming it as such, the girls in the class viewed as salient the differences between themselves and boys along the lines of gender, and not so much along the lines of race or ethnicity because they all shared a Latin@ identity. So although the girls were not necessarily referring to a social movement in the same way that feminists of color were talking about, I argue that they were combining their positionality as girls and the experiences they had with boys to make sense of the sexism that they felt was happening between themselves and boys. It is important to note here that the girls never identified the boys' behavior as sexism, but rather that is my interpretation based on the data and tools I use to analyze the data.

The first time that I became more fully aware of the fact that the girls were having issues with the boys in their fifth-grade classroom was early on in the 2014-2015 academic year. It happened on a day where none of the boys were present in the college class. This was also the same day that I described in Chapter 4 when I mention that the girls were more interested in talking about their science field trip than they were about Mexican identity. As stated earlier, I allowed the students to switch the subject to their

field trip because it was clear that keeping my own agenda was not going to be productive. What I did not anticipate about that day in October, however, was that the conversation would eventually move from talking about the field trip, to talking about their relationships with boys in their class.

Specifically, this conversation came about because they were describing the actions of two boys who went on the field trip: Gonzalo, who I introduced in Chapter 4, and another boy (Rafael) who was new to the school and their class. The excerpt that I highlight below is part of the conversation that we had on that day. Belinda brought up to the group that Gonzalo and Rafael were joking around on their field trip, including pretending to act like hitch-hikers by sticking their thumbs out whenever cars would pass by. Belinda was recounting their "hitch-hiking" on the field trip because she thought it was funny. As the other girls join in on the story that Belinda shares, they go on to describe Rafael, who at that time, had been at Jackson for less than 2 months.

Selena: Es bien atrevido[33] (referring to Rafael). And he's new like….

Belinda: I thought he was gonna be like a nice kid but…(pauses) no, I don't want to be mean….

Rosa:..he's mean….

Sky:..he transitioned to the 'boys' (says the last word in a sarcastic tone)

Selena:…you know what he says, he says, 'hola guey'[34] (laughs at this last part of her sentence)…

Socorro:…he talks like that?

Sky: Yeah! He's turned into….

[33] He's really daring
[34] What's up fool?

Belinda:…a monster…

Sara:…he's evil. Like muhahahaaha! (starts laughing in an "evil" voice)…

Belinda:…he says a lot of bad words now…

Sara:…He's turned into this! (makes a twisted looking face)….

Socorro:..is that how you guys think the boys act?

Rosa:…yeah….

Selena:..not all of them…

Sara:…(still doing her "evil" laugh, while the other girls are talking over one another)….

Belinda:…Mateo is nice….

Rosa:…(talking about Rafael) the whole time he kept saying during the [field] trip, 'oooo, Rosa, there's a spider there' and I hate spiders….

As this example illustrates, though Belinda thought Gonzalo's and Rafael's actions were funny, these actions quickly became a reminder of how atrevido, or daring, Rafael was, to the point where he was following the lead of other boys in his class. The girls draw the conclusion that Rafael has transitioned into becoming "one of the boys," meaning that he embodies what they describe as a "mean" persona. Not only does Rafael mimic the actions of Gonzalo, who is notorious for getting into trouble in his class, but Rafael also "says a lot of bad words," which they view as a reflection of what the boys in their class have taught him. What is interesting about the girls making this connection is that both Rafael and his older brother (who at the time was in sixth-grade), initially started off the school year speaking more Spanish than English. Both Rafael and his brother participated in the dual immersion class in their respective grade levels. Thus,

Rafael quickly learning bad words, and saying them in both English and Spanish, was indicative of how the boys in his class were persuading him to talk.

Belinda comments that she thought Rafael was "gonna be a nice kid," but then stops herself from saying what her classmates were observing: that Rafael transitioned into becoming one of the boys, which in turn meant that he was purposefully "mean." Sky points this out when she comments in a sarcastic tone that Rafael is like "one of the boys," even though he was new to the school. Belinda even metaphorically calls him a "monster." I argue that Belinda uses this term metaphorically not because she actually thinks Rafael is a monster, but because she notes Rafael's quick transition from being the "new kid" to "joining" the boys. In fact, Sky implicitly states this transition when she says "he's turned into," signifying a shift. From this conversation, and from other pláticas, several of the girls noted that Rafael was quiet when he first started the school year, but that within a few weeks was picking up on the behaviors of his male peers, including saying "bad words," and making fun of the girls.

In this initial conversation about the boys, it became clear to me that the girls were coming into the space with their own "theories in the flesh" about the behaviors of boys in their lives. For example, as I have mentioned above, they noted that Rafael as the new student made his transition into becoming "one of the boys." The girls were using the term "one of the boys" not merely to designate Rafael into a male category, but they were rather using it to describe a particular persona and way of being. I argue here then, that "one of the boys" was one way that the girls were theorizing and making sense of the behavior of their male classmates, particularly behaviors that they often categorized as rude and demeaning towards them.

During that same conversation in class, the girls elaborated on what they considered "mean" behavior on behalf of the boys in their class. Specifically, they talked about recess and how the boys often either excluded them from playing altogether, or would play extra rough on purpose to discourage the girls from wanting to play sports with them. The excerpt below demonstrates this.

Rosa: So whenever we are in PE.....

Sky:…ohhhhh….

Rosa:…it's always boys versus girls…..

Sky:..yeahhhh….

Rosa:…and like the boys they always like push us…

Sky:…they tackle us (girls start talking loudly over one another as Rosa mentions that the boys push them)….

Selena:…yeah they go like this (makes a motion with her hands) and they push us against the wall and then they, another boy comes and they take it out (referring to the balls they use when they go outside for recess)….

Rosa:…and then Antonio, like when we are playing ragdoll, they have like a flag and you have to pull it out….

Socorro:….oh yeah….

Rosa:…Antonio, he kneed (hit her with his knee) Esperanza in the back and then she like fell to the ground….

Sara:….(makes loud noises with her mouth as Rosa is telling the story)….

Rosa:…..and then Herman pushed me to the ground……

Socorro:…so boys are really rough with you guys?

Girls: Yeah!!

Rosa: Especially when we are playing boys against girls.

Socorro: And why do you think they do that?

Rosa: Because they like to. When I was in first grade and I wanted to play soccer with the boys they didn't let me so, so like I had to play against them, and like they played rough especially because they didn't want me to play.

Sky: And no like, they, I think they think they play hard.

Socorro: So they don't think girls can play as rough as them or as good?

Sky: yeah……

Sara:…they are *machistas*!! (emphasizes the last word that she says)

Sky: Can I talk?....

Rosa:…they *are* machistas sometimes!

Socorro: Hold on, Belinda had her hand raised and then Sara. Belinda go ahead.

Belinda: So, so we have been reading this, something about….(the overhead intercom comes on, and they announce a student's name to go down to the office)…but also um, Nellie Bly and stuff….

Socorro:…Nellie who?

Belinda: Nellie Bly….

Socorro:..she's an author?

Selena:..no, she's the one that, she's a…(pauses) *periodista* (both her and Sara say this word at the same time in a loud voice)….

Socorro:…ok so a journalist.

Belinda: Yeah, exactly….

Sara:…a journalist!? (she says in a loud, confused, but half playing around voice)

Belinda: Yeah (addressing Sara's comment) she proved that, that a lady….

Selena: (says something inaudible)….

Belinda:…that women can….

Sara:..can go around the world in less than 80 days….

Belinda:..yeah without, without a man.

Socorro: Ok…

Sara:..Ey, tenemos unas buenas piernas, sabes por qué[35]?

Socorro: Por qué[36]?

Sara: ¡Si un niño te trata de (pauses shortly, then makes loud kissing noises), tu le haces asi![37] (kicks her legs forward as if to push someone away. Sara and Selena both start laughing loudly and hysterically at Sara's comment)

Belinda:..I think you're a little too young still…

Socorro: (laughing lowly) I think that's off topic a little bit but Sara you said that boys are machista, what does that mean?

Sara: Cuz! (shouts loudly)

Belinda: Yeah, but what does that mean? (says this in a tone of voice as if she is reiterating my question, rather than as if she doesn't actually know what that means)

Socorro: What is a machista?

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[35] We have some good legs, do you know why?
[36] Why?
[37] If a boy tries to kiss you, you can do this and kick him away!

Sara: When *you* think that only boys, or (very short pause) boys think that they could only do that but girls can't (says the last part in a country-sounding voice).

In this example, the dialogue started with the girls talking about how the boys "play rough" with them during recess or PE. Rosa is the one who brings up the boys' rough behavior and gives the specific example of her classmate Antonio hitting Esperanza in the back with his knee, and leaving her on the ground. Though it can be argued that if boys were playing only with boys, they would still engage in this type of rough play, the girls make it clear that they understand the boys' actions towards them to be related to their gender. In particular, Rosa parallels how the boys play sports with her now, as a fifth-grader, to how they played with her back when she was in first grade. She states that back in first grade, the boys did not want her to play with them because she is a girl. Thus, they engaged in "rough play" or behaviors to discourage her from wanting to play soccer with them. She equates her experiences as a first grader playing soccer with boys, to her current experiences playing ragdoll and other sports with boys, many of whom have been her classmates since first grade.

After Rosa shares her story of feeling excluded from playing soccer with the boys as a first grader, Sara jumps into the conversation and calls the boys "machistas," in reference to them thinking that they can play sports better than the girls. Specifically, Sara brings up the word machista almost immediately after I ask if the boys think that the girls cannot play as rough, or as well as them during sports. Sara's use of the word machista then prompts Rosa to describe her experiences and the boys' actions—the boys thought they were better at sports because they were being machistas. This particular instance was a pedagogical moment for Rosa (and perhaps for the other girls who were

there also) because it was almost as if she was searching for something in a dark room. When Sara says machistas, it was as if the lights were flicked on and Rosa had found what she was looking for. She demonstrates this when she emphasizes the word "are" in her comment "they *are* machistas sometimes!"

Sara, who initially brought up the word "machista," demonstrates her pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) by invoking that word, heard in another context, to describe how boys treat them during recess. Up until that point, we had not at all discussed machismo or machistas, so it was clear that Sara had learned that term in another aspect of her life. When I ask Sara to define what she means by machistas, she demonstrates that she understands it in relationship to the boys in her classroom thinking that they are capable of doing things that girls cannot. In her definition, she illustrates that for her, machistas are broadly defined as boys (and men) who believe that they are superior to girls (and women). In this way, I argue, Sara demonstrates her pedagogies of the home related to her gender consciousness development. In other words, her usage of the word machista indicates that she has not only heard this word before, but she understands it well enough to use it and define it in contexts other than the one in which she heard it. Because I never had the chance to speak with Sara in pláticas outside of the college class space about her understanding of machismo specifically, I draw the conclusion that she must have heard this word before in some type of home space, whether it was her immediate home space or another extended family one. Thus, Sara demonstrated her pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) by using this word in our college class context. Making a connection between how she understood it and how she believed it applied to the boys in her class, Sara uses her knowledge of machismo to

specifically name what she felt she was experiencing as a result of her gender—that is, unfair treatment from the boys.

Another part of the above excerpt that I would like to highlight in relationship to Sara's pedagogies of the home is when she makes a comment in Spanish about pushing boys away if they get too close. Specifically, Sara asks me if I know why girls and women have "good legs" (buenas piernas). When I ask her to tell me why, Sara says that it is so that girls (and women) can use their legs to push boys (and men) away when they get too close to them and make them feel uncomfortable. Though she makes this comment in a very playful and humorous tone, it seems as if she has heard this somewhere else, particularly given that she felt the need to say it in Spanish. Though everyone who participated in the college class was bilingual, they frequently spoke more English than Spanish. However, when students did use Spanish, it was often in reference to something their parents or family members told them, or even dichos (phrases) and consejos (advice) that they were getting from home (Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2001). Rather than translate these dichos and consejos from home, the youth would repeat them, in most cases verbatim. Thus, in scenarios where students did use Spanish to express themselves, it was most often connected to a form of knowledge coming from their home—either from a parent, sibling, or extended family member (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Elenes et al., 2001). In sharing what she did about using her legs to push boys away, I argue that Sara provides some insight into her worldview as a young Mexicana living in Salt Lake City. Even though she made the comment to be funny, one can combine Sara's knowledge of the word machista with the knowledge that she demonstrates of having to protect herself as a young Brown female, to conclude that her

perspectives are fueled by the realities of her positionality (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Using what she has learned from others at home and in her community, Sara connects this knowledge to how she makes sense of the "machista" behavior of her male classmates.

When Sara makes her comment about having "good legs" and bursts out into laughter with Selena, I make a comment about her being off topic. Clearly, as I have demonstrated above she is not necessarily off topic. However, in that moment, I was more concerned with trying to specifically understand how Sara defined or understood machista, than I was with the story she shared. This is why I make attempts to shift the conversation back to asking Sara to define machista because I did not want to "lose that moment." There have been many cases where students make profound comments but they do not elaborate more because either they mentally have switched gears (meaning they may not want to talk about that topic anymore), or they were distracted by something else with another classmate. In trying to ensure that I was capturing as best I could the statements that I found to be telling, I sometimes ignored or missed other statements that could be viewed as equally important. Telling Sara that it was "a little off topic" is a perfect example of this and of the pedagogical issues that can arise as a researcher making sense of the constant data that I am immersed in. Only when looking back on this incident reflexively, as I have done above, can I truly make better sense of my own actions.

On another class day in mid-November, the girls were once again the only ones who were present. During the first half of that class meeting, we had Dr. Enrique Alemán come in and share the work that he did in preparing the documentary *Stolen Education.* The documentary details a school related court case in the Driscoll School District in

Texas. We wanted to share parts of the film with the students so that they could do a family history project that would be related to what they learned in the documentary. The second half of that class meeting was supposed to be dedicated to introducing a meme project, where students would need to create their own memes about a topic that we had discussed in class (e.g., racism). The meme project would require an image and text, similar to the memes that are found within popular culture. Towards the end of our class session, when we are discussing the details of the meme project, the students ask if they are working individually or in partners for their presentations. It was at this point in the conversation that the girls started talking in broader terms about group work, but specifically the boys pairing up to do group work. From here on, the discussion shifts from talking about the projects to talking about their relationship with boys in the class, but more specifically during the regular school day.

Max: Are we working in partners?

Socorro: Hmmm…we haven't decided, you can either have a partner or you could do it individually.

Girls:...partners (elongate their pronunciation of the word as they say it)…

Sylvia: Partners? Then you have to do two memes (laughs).

Socorro: Yeah.

Lupita: That's ok.

Socorro: As long as (pauses), if you can have a partner and you guys are gonna work and it's not gonna turn into like…

Max:…a *huge* blob…….

Socorro:…or craziness.

Max: Yeah.

Socorro: Ok.

Rosa: Except don't put Gonzalo and Felipe together because….

Sky:…that's just no…..

Max: oh my God….

Lupita:..that would be terrible…..

Sylvia:…they are the only boys though….

Socorro:…yeah they are the only boys so they are probably going to want to be together….

Max:…but Gonzalo last time he said that Felipe doesn't act like a boy.

Sky: (laughing as she speaks) Yeah Samantha says that Felipe is not a real man.

Max: Felipe is like a…(pauses)….

Sky:…he's like (pauses)…

Max:…he's like a…..(another pause but longer) a good friend.

Sylvia: Yeah?

Max: Yeah.

Sylvia: Yeah he is a good friend.

Max: he's funny (starts laughing as she says this and some of the other girls join in)…

Socorro:…well I feel like some people think that Felipe doesn't (using hands to mimic quotes) 'act like a boy', but then some people like him better because he *doesn't* act like a boy…..

Sky:..yeah it's better!

Sylvia and Girls: (laughing loudly)

Max: Yeah cuz all the boys (her voice trails off at the end)….

Rosa:..the boys in our class are really mean to us….

Girls: Yeaahhhh! (in loud voices)

Sky: They're like weird! Today I almost got knocked over onto my desk because of Antonio and Hernan.

Max: I know!

Lupita: Oh yeah! It was Antonio's fault.

Max: She [their fifth-grade teacher] caught Antonio once sleeping.

Girls: (laughing)

Lupita: She took a picture of it….

Sky:..she took a picture! (saying this as she laughs) And she showed it to his parents on parent teacher conferences, it was so funny!!! (raising her voice at the end)

Max: He would go like this (laying her head down on the table)….

Rosa:..and then Ms. Peterson, she tiptoed and she got her iPad and she was like, she took a picture.

Sky: Oh! Last year I was his partner….

Socorro:…well that's good that she showed it to his mom…..

Sky:..last year I was his partner and Gonzalo too and like when we were doing math projects, he would always be like (makes snoring noises) and then like, I was like 'Antonio wake up' and he's like (puts her hand up as if to cover someone's face with it) 'talk to the hand' (her and the other girls laughing)

Socorro: So we need to have a talk with (pauses) well we also want Gonzalo and Felipe to be here too for that though….

Max: for what?

Socorro:…cuz they are boys, to talk about gender.

Sky and Max: ooooooooo

Sky: We only talk about gender when they're not here! (laughs)

Rosa: Yeah like last time there was only girls and we talked about gender stuff.…

Sylvia:…well cuz do you think they would feel left out and like picked on?

Girls: (grumble in long, low noises)

In the above excerpt, the girls draw from their experiences with boys during the regular school day as well as past experiences that they had in fourth-grade. Although initially talking about the boys was not necessarily the topic, the girls once again switched the conversation when it came to discussing whether or not they could do their projects in groups. Specifically, Rosa is the one who suggests that I not pair Gonzalo and Felipe together because as a pair, they "act up." In bringing this up, the other girls also agree with Rosa that grouping them together is a bad idea. However, the girls then make a distinction between Felipe and Gonzalo's individual behavior. Max highlights this point when she states that Gonzalo said that "Felipe doesn't act like a boy." What the girls pick up on here, I argue, is Felipe's ability to embody multiple personas, including one that is more stereotypically masculine or "boy-like" (which allows him to be friends with Gonzalo), and one that is less masculine that allows him to be friends with the girls. In this way, the girls appear to recognize how masculinity and gender performance structures and impacts the behaviors of their male classmates (hooks, 2004). They

identified other forms of this behavior earlier when they noted how Rafael became "one of the boys." The girls utilize both their facultad[38] (Anzaldúa, 2007) and their theories in the flesh in analyzing and identifying Felipe's performance of masculinity. Again, the girls do not verbalize this as a "gendered performance." However, they do recognize that when Felipe acts less "like a boy" it is when he is either by himself, or when he is around other boys in the class that do not act stereotypically masculine, such as Mateo. Because they can recognize how they are excluded because of their gender, or how they are "…pushed out of the tribe for being different" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 60), I argue that the girls have developed a facultad that is tied to their experiences as young Brown girls. I further argue that developing this facultad is also tied to the girls' ongoing consciousness regarding gender discrimination, or what I name their paths of conocimiento (Anzaldúa, 2002).

The plethora of experiences that the girls have specifically with boys at school and in their class contributes to their shift in perceptions and consciousness. Anzaldúa (2007) writes that there is a "…deeper sensing that is another aspect of this faculty…it is anything that breaks into one's everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one's defenses and resistance…causes a shift in perception" (p. 61). Thus, I argue that in attempting to make sense and theorize about the actions of their male classmates, the girls demonstrate how their facultad has aided them in identifying, without naming, the sexism they encounter daily from their classmates. In analyzing the data, I argue that this facultad teaches the girls to be wary of their male classmates because there is a high

[38] Anzaldúa (2007) identifies facultad as the extra sense that women of color have, developed from experience, that allows them to survive in the world. Specifically, facultad comes from experiences of marginalization that teach us how we should protect ourselves, and from whom.

chance that the boys will be sexist towards them. Although they do not put all of the boys into the sexist category, as evidenced by their relationship with Felipe, they have created a broad category for the "rest of the boys" who they all perceive as acting "the same" and in essence, sexist.

Sky also demonstrates this facultad when she laughs about her friend (and class participant) Samantha's comment about Felipe "not being a real man." The girls are specifically identifying masculine (in their case boy) behavior to be intentionally rude towards girls, in multiple ways. In acknowledging that Felipe is different and can be nice, they are able to separate Felipe's embodiment of gender roles from his sex, meaning that even as someone who presents himself as a boy, it is acceptable (and even desirable) for him to act less "like a boy."

As the girls compare Felipe's behavior to that of other boys in their class, they highlight that his behavior "is better" and they would prefer it. When they start talking about the other boys in their class compared to Felipe, Rosa brings up that the other boys in the class are mean. They then start to bring up themes that are similarly present in the data I shared previously when the class only had girls. In particular, Sky brings up a scenario where Antonio and Hernan almost knock her over onto her desk, presumably because they were playing around or doing something rambunctious in class. Her experience parallels what Rosa mentioned in the earlier excerpts I shared when she says that Antonio kneed Esperanza in the back and she fell to the ground.

At that point in the school year, we had not formally talked about gender discrimination as part of the curriculum. Although it was implied in much of what we did, it was not necessarily a topic or theme of one of our lessons. Thus, when I talk to the

girls about needing to have a conversation explicitly about gender discrimination, I mention to them that I would want the boys in the class to also be present, who at that time were only Felipe and Gonzalo. It was after I made this comment when Sky notes that the "only" times we talked about gender (in this case gender performance and masculinity) was when the boys were *not* present. Sky implicitly points to an important part of feminist praxis—having female only spaces where women can share experiences of gender discrimination (Flores & Garcia, 2009; Lorde, 2012; Revilla, 2004). I argue that in instances in the college class where only the girls were present, they were metaphorically engaging in their "kitchen table talk," which some Chicana feminists identify as the "precursor" to their writing process (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, Villenas, 2006). This of course does not mean that all of the theorizing necessarily happened at the kitchen table, but rather that such an intimate space was useful in sharing ideas. In thinking about the spaces that are available to young Brown youth, it is no surprise that the girls used opportunities when the boys were not there to have candid talks about their experiences. Based on my data and my relationships with the girls specifically, I suspect that part of their reasoning for not wanting boys around is that it allowed them to speak more openly, without necessarily fearing confrontation from the boys. The reason why I think this is that the girls spent the majority of their day "fighting" with boys—the last thing they wanted was another space at school where this could be repeated. They also often mentioned in our pláticas that if boys were not around, or if they were "all like Mateo," their schooling experiences would improve.

In the data that I have shared thus far, I argue that the girls were invoking their own theories in the flesh with regard to how they were understanding the behavior of

their male peers. Utilizing their experiences with boys in different facets of their lives, but particularly focusing on their relationships with boys at school, the girls were demonstrating their feminist sensibilities (facultad) as they tried to deconstruct the actions of their male classmates. They made clear distinctions in the behaviors of their male peers, such as when they noted that Felipe treated them differently than Gonzalo. They also understood that Felipe had multiple "selves," depending on who he was hanging out with. And they used pedagogical tools from home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) such as machista, to make sense of how the boys were constructing themselves as superior to them because of their gender.

In discussing these topics especially when the boys were not around, the girls reveal their varying levels of gender consciousness. That is, they demonstrate their awareness of the way they can be unfairly treated because of their gender expression. The girls were understanding gender discrimination via their own path of conocimiento. Though Anzaldúa's theorization of consciousness, the path of conocimiento, has rarely been applied to the contexts of young Brown youth, I argue that the path of conocimiento is a useful tool in helping me make sense of my data. Specifically, the experiences of the girls that I share above reveal how they understand certain instances (such as sports during recess) are tied to their positionality as girls. In other words, they recognize that if they were boys, they would be treated differently. In developing their path of conocimiento, I argue that the girls are seeking to better understand *why* their relationships with boys are the way that they are. Their desire to make sense of these relationships and explicitly center them in their dialogue is a reflection of their search for a "deeper meaning" to the interactions between boys and girls. As Anzaldúa (2002)

writes, the path of conocimiento is tied to our "…struggle each day to know the world [we] live in, to come to grips with the problems of life" (p. 540). I argue that the girls were wanting to know and learn more about what was most relevant to them in their lives, in this case, understanding their interactions with boys. This is also evidenced by the fact that they naturally brought up these interactions when the boys were not present because they sought a space where they could center their experiences.

I further argue that on their path of conocimiento, the girls most often found themselves in nepantla—negotiating how they should interact with boys and the conflict they felt in wanting to change these interactions. On the one hand, they often found the behavior of their male classmates to be genuinely funny. When Belinda brings up for example Gonzalo and Rafael's "hitchhiking" on the field trip, she does so not because it particularly bothered her, but because she thought it was funny. She then later comments that she thought Rafael was going to be a "nice kid" but he ended up turning "into a monster" because he adapted his behaviors to mimic that of the boys in their class. This is an example of the conflicting ways that Belinda describes the boys' behavior—as both funny and entertaining, but also as mean and "monster-like."

Though Sky clearly wanted more boys to act like Felipe, she thought it was funny when her friend Samantha said that Felipe is not "a real man." So although she wanted Felipe to not act like the rest of the boys, Sky would still engage in behaviors to make fun of him for not doing so. In the excerpt below, we attempt to tease this point out somewhat when we talk about what are some of the pressures that boys face when it comes to how they act. This dialogue comes from the same class day as the one described above in mid-November.

Socorro: So it is important I think, sometimes in spaces we feel more comfortable with other girls to share, but I think it's also important that boys be there because they probably also like, need to hear it too, right?

Sylvia: They don't know or they need to talk too….

Socorro:..or they have things like, maybe they do want to be different but maybe they feel like they can't. And so they act all 'cool' and like they can't cry and stuff but really they wanna cry or something….

Rosa:..that's like almost every single boy in the school…

Everyone: (laughing)

Max: Yeah, I agree.

Sky: Except for (pauses) Mateo.

Lupita: Yeah Mateo is nice.

Sky: He's super nice!

Socorro: But do other boys make fun of him for being like that?

Rosa: Sometimes…

Max:…not really…

Sky:..hmmm, I don't know!

Socorro: Sometimes?

Sylvia: or they make fun of Felipe?

Sky: Oh, yeah (laughing).

Socorro: See that's what I mean, so he tries to be different and then they tell him he can't right?

Max: Like Mateo and Felipe they always hang out and they're nice, like to us.

Sky: But then when Felipe hangs out with Gonzalo, it's a differennnceeee…

Max:..yeah it's different….

Rosa:….yeah they're mean.

Max: Like they change their attitudes whoever they are with.

Here, Sylvia and I attempt to point out to the girls a broader force that may be shaping the behavior of the boys in their class. We suggest that their behavior sometimes goes beyond their own actions, and that they are often pressured to present themselves a certain way. Without naming it as such, Sylvia and I draw from feminists of color who write about patriarchy and the implications it has for communities of color when male patriarchs are also of color. Specifically, what I had in mind but did not verbalize to the girls at this time, was hooks' work on Black male masculinity and the politics of "being cool." Though she focuses her analysis on Black boys and men, there are certainly implications in her work for other men of color. Hooks (2004) writes that many young black males are socialized to believe that they are only body and not mind, and therefore may work to hide their intellectual capabilities. This notion aligns well with the overall behavior of the boys that the girls identify—generally that they act like they do not care about school because they get in trouble often, do not pay attention in class and pretend to sleep in class. This overarching theme of "cool" behavior as described by hooks (2004) fits with what the girls observe and theorize is a part of being "one of the boys." The girls note that both Mateo and Felipe, who are in their fifth-grade class, are the only boys who are the least susceptible to the pressures that boys generally face with regard to how they should act. They make this clear when they differentiate Felipe and Mateo from other boys. When I ask them if Felipe and Mateo get made fun of for acting differently, the

girls are unsure. However, when I ask specifically about Felipe, Sky immediately says "yes," perhaps referring to the earlier comment she shared about Felipe not being "a real man."

As mentioned earlier, the girls again recognize that Felipe's behavior is somewhat contingent upon who he is with. For the most part, they highlight that Felipe acts differently than the other boys. However, they note that when Felipe is with Gonzalo, his behavior changes. For most of the college class, Felipe and Gonzalo were the only boys present. On most occasions however, it was usually Felipe who was the only male in class, because for a 3-month period Gonzalo was out of town visiting his family in Mexico (later in the year, in March, is when Jose and Ramiro joined the class). In noting how Felipe changes his behavior, I argue that the girls use their gender consciousness to make sense of why that is, in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, they understand that Felipe changes his behavior around Gonzalo. Indirectly however, they also understand that Felipe and Gonzalo were the only two boys in the class and because of that, Felipe's behavior was even more drastically changed than it may have otherwise been if there were more boys present, or if Mateo had participated in the class. This is why Rosa suggests that I not allow them to be grouped together for their project.

Hooks (2004) also theorizes about the ways that Black youth put on a "ghetto" minstrel show to protect themselves in school settings. Specifically, she writes, "[o]ften in predominantly White educational settings, Black males put on their ghetto minstrel show as a way of protecting themselves from white racialized rage" (hooks, 2004, p. 42). Here, hooks references how Black youth can recognize that their intelligence, among other factors, is viewed as a threat from the perspective of White people and Whiteness.

This is why, she argues, Black youth put on a "ghetto minstrel show," so they can fall into the trope of what is already expected of them (i.e., not being intellectually capable) so that they do not, metaphorically speaking, "raise any eyebrows." This type of behavior can be done both consciously and unconsciously. In both cases, hooks argues, the effects can be devastating because it once again keeps Black youth relegated to a position of subordination. Given that Felipe consciously changed his behavior according to who he was around, I argue that he engaged in a politics of putting on a "minstrel show," along with his other male classmates.[39] I am not arguing that the boys necessarily knew they were engaging in a "minstrel show"—their behavior may have felt genuine to them. However, I am arguing that they, at least unconsciously, absorbed and performed the role that boys and particularly boys of color often have in schools—acting out, getting into trouble, pretending like they do not care, and bullying others.

Even though the girls recognized that Felipe could act differently based on who he was with, they still expressed overall that Felipe was nicer in comparison to the other boys. As such, they felt comfortable discussing gender discrimination even when Felipe (but not Gonzalo) was present. In the next section, I examine how the discussions that the girls had about gender transitioned to including Felipe and then to including Gonzalo, Jose, and Ramiro. In moving their discussions about gender from spaces that only included females to spaces where boys were also present, I argue that the girls continually grappled with their own paths of conocimiento and negotiated how they wanted to move from "theorizing to action." In other words, the more we discussed gender discrimination, the more urgent the need became for the girls to share what they

[39] Though the demographics of the school student body are not majority White, the teachers are majority White and many of them hold deficit views about students and families of color.

were feeling with the very boys who were the ones they felt needed to hear it. The next section examines how we collectively tried to handle those issues, and the nepantla space that we navigated together.

A Constant State of Nepantla: Navigating Gendered Experiences

The spring semester of the 2014-2015 academic year is when we formally introduced gender discrimination as a curricular topic. Specifically, the first time we talked about gender was on January 23rd, 2015, when we had the students do a magazine project that focused on discussing body image. At this time, Gonzalo was out of town and had not attended school in about 6 weeks. Thus, on this particular day when we talked about gender inequality, Felipe and Raul were the only boys present. Raul was a sixth-grader who had already participated in the college class the previous year, 2013-2014. On a few occasions we had students from the previous college class cohort come and help mentor the current students. Raul, is described similarly to how the girls described Felipe—he is nice and does not act like other boys. Though we did not intentionally plan to discuss gender inequality without Gonzalo present, at the time it was unclear when he would return. The primary reason why we wanted to start the second semester with a focus on gender was largely that the girls had already been talking about it. We wanted to have a more focused discussion on gender discrimination so that we could connect it to the larger social forces that shape gender roles.

My goals for sharing the data in this section are to demonstrate our ongoing discussions about gender inequality and how these discussions later contributed to the girls wanting to "take action." In other words, the girls wanted to not only let the boys

know how their behaviors were impacting them, but they also wanted them to stop engaging in those behaviors altogether. In connecting this back to my third research question, I argue that the girls were engaging in a process of critical dialogue and self-reflection that in some ways, prompted them to want to take action. At the same time, my aim in sharing these data is to also show how the girls, and even we as instructors, were in a constant state of nepantla when it came to negotiating the interactions between boys and girls. In several instances for example, the girls wanted us to kick the boys out of the class permanently, mostly because they did not want to "deal" with their behavior. At times we struggled with knowing how to handle these issues, given that we did not want to exclude the boys from participating. Thus, I hope to illustrate the complexities that we encountered as the girls discussed gender discrimination and connected it to the experiences they were having in their lives.

In discussing gender discrimination, we attempted to highlight how gender is a social construction. In foregrounding this, our hope was that the students would be able to further identify how constructions of both boys and girls can shape their actions in various ways. In the dialogue below, we had already introduced the idea of "social construction." We followed up on this discussion by asking students how it is that they learn about gender.

> Socorro: So if you guys lived alone on an island, you probably wouldn't know what gender is, right? So then where do you learn what gender is? What teaches you?
>
> Samantha: Your family…
>
> Felipe:…Teachers….

Sky:…by looking at other people…

Lupita:…you learn by yourself….

Guadalupe:..you move to USA.

Sylvia: the US? Alright.

Socorro: There's all kinds of things that teach you what is a boy and what is a girl, right? When you guys say that boys can't….

Rosa:…in the magazines the boys always have six packs and like the girls, they have like perfect bodies…..

Guadalupe:…cuz they do photoshops! (shouts loudly as Rosa is talking)

Rosa: (addressing Guadalupe's comment) Yeah!

Everyone: (laughing)

Lupita: They make them look perfect! There's this music video that Guadalupe did a project on….

Guadalupe: Gold!

Lupita: Gold, uh-huh. There's this boy that he does ballet and the rest of the boys….

Guadalupe:…like the football people are laughing like (makes loud noises that sound like a monkey)….

Everyone: (laughing)

Socorro: And then what do you think, what does it do to that boy when that boy is like….

Sky:…it puts him down! (shouts loudly)

I share this example to illustrate how the girls are connecting the concepts that we talk about in the college class with other aspects of their lives. Rosa mentions how magazines shape perceptions of body image for both men and women. She brought this up *prior* to us working on the magazine activity that we had planned for that day. In other words, she was already making connections about how gender is shaped by society by pointing specifically to magazines which target a general audience. Lupita also points to the example of the music video that Guadalupe presented on for her fifth-grade oral history project (the projects that we work on with them during the school day in their classroom via the Adelante Partnership). In the music video, the "football boys" make fun of another boy who does ballet because ballet is a stereotypically feminine activity. Sky highlights that when boys are made fun of for reasons such as choosing to do ballet, it "puts them down."

As we continued our discussion on gender, the girls once again brought up how the boys play rough with them during recess and sports. Specifically, Rosa recounts the same story that she had told on another occasion, where she felt excluded by the boys in the first grade because they did not let her play soccer. This dialogue is shown below.

> Rosa: In first grade, I wanted to play soccer with the boys but then they wouldn't let me so they're like, 'if we play a game against you'….
>
> Sky:…oh yeah, I remember….
>
> Rosa:..like all the boys, like we'll play against you and if we win, then you can't play with us but if you win then you can play with us….
>
> Sky:..so if you just scored a goal?
>
> Rosa: No if I like….

Socorro:..you had to beat them?

Rosa: Yeah.

Socorro: So you had to prove yourself?

Rosa: Yeah.

Felipe: And then what happened?

Sky: Can I say one more thing?

Socorro: Yes, Sky.

Rosa: Well cuz they were bigger they would like push me….

Sky:..yeah they play soccer like football. It's mean.

Samantha: Yeah they tackle each other….

Felipe:…that's why I don't play with them.

It is clear from Rosa recounting this same story about her experience in first grade during recess trying to play soccer with the boys, that it had a large impact on her. She retold the story in much the same fashion as before, with the same details. I highlight this particular instance because it was one of the first times that boys were present as the girls discussed how they felt about playing sports with boys. Although both Felipe and Raul were there that day, Felipe was the only boy who was a part of both the college class and the girls fifth-grade classroom. His reaction to the girls and their discussions about the behavior of boys was that he mostly listened and whenever he would interject it would usually be to clarify, rather than challenge the girls' experiences. In the above example, Felipe asked Rosa a follow up question where he wanted to know what happened. He did not try to challenge Rosa's account of her story or make claims that she was being unfair

in her description of the boys. He even agreed with Sky when she said that the boys play soccer like football and commented "that's why I don't play with them."

Felipe's response to the girls on that day I believe aided them in feeling comfortable and not attacked for what they were sharing. On the other hand, perhaps Felipe was not challenging their experiences because he was the only male from their fifth-grade class. However, based on what Felipe shared, it seemed like he also, at least partially, agreed with the girls' description of the boys' behavior. Over the course of the school year, I observed how many of the boys struggled with their masculinity and as I have mentioned previously, engaged in a politics of putting on a "ghetto minstrel show" (hooks, 2004). In particular, Felipe was someone who stood out to me because his performance of gender *was* often different from that of his male classmates—he did not really engage in "gender bullying," where he would pick on the girls just because they were girls. Felipe did not mind that he would be the only boy in the class on many occasions because he was friends with the girls too—not many of his male peers were actual friends with the girls.

When we talked about gender discrimination on that day, I observed that Felipe was actively trying to process the discussion we were having. His most outspoken reaction came when we showed them a trailer for a then Sundance film, The Mask You Live In. Specifically, the movie is about how men handle the challenges and privileges associated with their masculine identity. The trailer provides a brief summary of the struggles associated with masculinity that will be addressed in the film, including not crying or showing emotion. It both opens and closes with phrases that are typically said

to both boys and men, such as “stop crying,” “stop with the tears,” and “be a man.” Below, I share Felipe’s thoughts and reactions to the 3-minute movie trailer.

Everyone: (while the trailer is playing, the room is completely silent).

Guadalupe: (as the trailer is ending) Coming soon to theaters (she says the last word in a low, deep voice).

Sylvia: (noticing that Felipe has his hand raised) Felipe, you have a comment?

Felipe: Yeah.

Sylvia: What’s up?

Felipe: Like, you know how like everyone, has like a very first friend you know…

Sylvia:..uh-huh. Hold on, I can’t hear Felipe (addressing two girls that are whispering to each other). Go ahead.

Felipe:…and then like, I saw like in movies your first friend is like your first enemy.

Sylvia: Your first friend is your first enemy?

Felipe: Yeah.

Sylvia: Why do you think that is?

Felipe: Because I don’t know.

Guadalupe: But Max was my first friend.

Max: Yeah.

Sylvia and some of the girls: (laugh)

Guadalupe: She’s not my enemy.

Sylvia: What in there (referencing the trailer) made you think about that?

Felipe: Well….(short pause) I have heard stuff in real life before.

Sylvia: You heard that in real life? Your first friend *was* your first enemy?

Felipe: I've heard all kinds of stuff. Mostly all of the stuff that people said here I've heard.

Sylvia: In the beginning?

Socorro: People have told you those things that they tell those boys?

Felipe: Ummm, yeah but I'm like stop it! (puts his hands over his ears to cover them)

Socorro: Like the (uses hands to make quotes) 'be a man' thing….

Felipe:…yeah….

Socorro:…or stop being etc. Stop doing….

Felipe:..yeah….

Felipe in this instance was the first person to make a comment about the trailer. Initially, he referenced a movie ("I saw like in movies") that equated a first friend to becoming an eventual enemy. Felipe does not clarify whether or not this actually happened to him. Even when Max and Guadalupe join the conversation saying that it did not hold true for them (they are still friends), Felipe does not say any more about this. As Sylvia continued probing what was on Felipe's mind, he then states that he has heard in "real life" nearly all of the phrases that were in the trailer. Felipe adds that he wants people to "stop it," or stop telling him how to act or be. I highlight this particular moment with Felipe because I feel that it validated the observations that I had made about him. I could tell that he was interested in the trailer because of how quickly he wanted to participate after it was over. His response of telling others to "stop it," I believe, is an indicator of how he struggles with and negotiates his daily realities as a young Brown

boy. Though he admits that he has been socialized to "act like a man" because of what people tell him a man is, he does not accept this definition without question. Though he undoubtedly is still to this day making sense of himself and his masculinity, Felipe was trying to engage in a process where he could deconstruct what it meant for him to "be a man."

I again use the work of hooks (2004) to help me make sense of what Felipe expresses above. Specifically, she writes, "Black males often exist in a prison of the mind unable to find their way out. In patriarchal culture, all males learn a role that restricts and confines" (hooks, 2004, p. xii). This particular quote from hooks, I believe, is the theorization of what Felipe expresses—metaphorically feeling trapped, constricted, and unable to find his way out. Felipe mentions that his approach to rejecting certain notions about masculinity is telling people to "stop it." However, his shifting gender performance demonstrates how he struggles with negotiating what people want him to be and who he wants to be. This is evidenced by the fact that he changes his behavior to fit with Gonzalo—if the opinions of others truly did not matter, he would have no use for changing how he acts.

As the year continued, issues related to gender kept coming up throughout. For most instances the girls were annoyed, but ended up laughing it off. In other cases, they were very clearly frustrated and even hurt by the actions of their male peers. The girls continued expressing their feelings towards the boys in the college class, but it was still mostly when the boys were not around. They also shared their feelings with us in the hallways and during recess. In most cases, Sylvia and I listened to them and tried to understand how it was they were navigating what they were feeling. However, in late

March right before the school's spring break, there was an instance where the girls were so frustrated that they felt it was important for them to speak to the vice principal.

The college class was scheduled to meet on March 25th, a few days before the school was to go on spring break. The last time that we had met prior to that was on March 2nd, a few weeks before. Thus, on the 25th, not a lot of the students were there because most of them had forgotten that we were even going to meet on that day. I remember walking into the classroom and it being empty. Normally, because school gets out at 2:45, the students are all in the classroom by 2:50, earlier than our 3:00 start time. Though the classroom was empty, I decided to wait until at least 3:15 to see if anyone was going to show up. If not, I was planning to leave. At about 3:05, there were four girls who walked into the classroom, looking frantic, upset, and exasperated. I recount what happened below via a field note that I wrote about that day.

> *I sat in the empty classroom, fiddling with an unopened bag of Cheez-Its in one hand and my cell phone in the other. Suddenly amidst the quiet I heard the door slam open.*
>
> *"Are we the only ones here?!", Max shouts, her backpack making a loud thump as it hits the table top.*
>
> *"So far, yes," I respond. "I feel like it might just be you guys today since it's already past three."*
>
> *"Yay!" they shout excitedly as they pull out their chairs to put their backpacks down. They then rush to the box of Cheez-Its and chips that are close to where I'm sitting to get their snack. The girls each grab two bags and open one immediately and start eating.*
>
> *"Oh my gosh today, Gonzalo!" Belinda shakes her head. You can see the Cheez-Its in her mouth as she speaks.*
>
> *"I know! He was being so annoying! Ugh!" Samantha says.*

"Yes, him and Antonio and Francisco were soooo bad today," Max says as she sits down in a chair close to mine. She shakes her head. "We told the teacher and everything but she didn't do anything!!! We should talk to Mr. Begay."

"What happened?" I asked. The girls start talking over one another as they answer my question.

"During recess they were playing around and were playing keep-a-way with Samantha's sweater…."

"….yeah and I kept telling them to give it back!" Samantha interjected.

"Yeah and then they finally threw it over the fence so we had to tell the teacher to get it back," Belinda adds. As the girls speak they keep shaking their heads and making faces as if they are disappointed.

"Then in class, Gonzalo and Antonio were taking my pencil bag and they broke one of the pencils and I was upset…."Max says as she finishes eating the chip in her mouth.

"And we told Ms. Peterson but she doesn't really do anything!" Belinda says in a loud voice.

"So then what happened?" I ask.

"She yelled at them but then when she turns around they call her bad words and names. They always do that," Lupita adds to the conversation.

"Yeah the boys are always saying bad words in Spanish, as soon as the teacher turns around, they start saying stuff and it's like she doesn't hear" Max says.

"Ughh!!! Antonio is always messing with my stuff during class! I hate sitting next to him, but the teacher makes me!" Belinda says in a frustrated voice.

"Yeah it's really bad, the boys are always cussing and doing things behind the teacher's back and then they don't listen in class. And they call the girls names too" Max comments, as she moves the hair out of her face with her left hand.

"What can you girls do about the boys in your class?" I ask.

"Well we already told the teacher a bunch of times and she just tells them to stop but they don't," Lupita says. "So I don't know."

"We should talk to Mr. Begay guys" Max comments. "Tell him what has been happening."

"Do you guys want to talk to him? Do you think he would help?" I ask.

"Well the teacher already knows and she's been knowing…"Belinda adds in a thoughtful voice. "But I don't know about going to see the vice principal…"

"Well if you guys really want to talk to him, I can go with you. Just think about what it is that you want to tell him and also what you want him to do about it," I add.

"Yes, let's go!!!" Lupita says in an excited voice.

"Yeah I feel like we should" Samantha adds.

"Yes!" Max shouts.

"Well I feel like Francisco doesn't really bother me that much during class…"Belinda says in a hesitant voice. She seems unsure about wanting to talk to the vice principal.

"Yes! You're always saying that they bother you, if we go, we have to go together" Max adds.

"If you guys really want to talk to him we can go right now and I'll go. But you have to be sure that you feel comfortable going, if not that's ok" I comment. Belinda looks down at her bag of chips, still appearing seemingly unsure.

The reason I share this brief field note is that I wanted to highlight how the girls were getting increasingly tired of the boys' behavior. They were also getting tired of it not being addressed. In the above example, although they begin by sharing an instance that happened on that day, they then talked about how that instance was part of a recurring pattern. As I have mentioned, the girls had been expressing their issues with boys since at least October. On this day in March, much of what they were sharing paralleled what they had been saying all year long. The difference was that on this occasion, they were more visibly upset and disappointed by their experiences with boys. Max was the one who initially brought up speaking to the vice principal about having him address it. I feel that she made that suggestion because she understood that talking to

their fifth-grade teacher about it was not sufficient—they were not getting the results they wanted.

In visually seeing how distressed they were, I suggested that I would go with them to speak to the vice principal. The reason I suggested this was that I knew that whenever students had to talk to the principal or vice principal about something, it was a big deal. As someone who had been hearing their distress for most of the year, I felt a responsibility to help them address what was bothering them. Particularly on this day, Max was the first one to bring up talking to Mr. Begay. In suggesting that, I began to think that perhaps that *would* be a good idea. It made sense given that the girls had attempted to resolve their issues via their other available avenue—their fifth-grade teacher. I also was aware of the fact that talking to administrators about these issues was a game changer—it could make the situation better or worse, or both at different times. Knowing what the girls would potentially confront (i.e., the boys finding out who told on them and retaliating), I felt that I needed to be present for their talk with Mr. Begay. However, I was also aware of the fact that I did not want to make it "my issue"—I wanted the girls to speak for themselves and come up with their own carefully crafted solutions to the issue.

During our discussion that day, I noticed how Belinda became increasingly uncomfortable the more that talking to Mr. Begay was an imminent reality. Because of what she had shared during the college class about boys and even on that day, I knew that the behavior of many boys did in fact bother her. However, Belinda is a student who typically avoids any and all confrontation, if possible, particularly when that confrontation is between students and teachers and/or administrators. I observed

throughout the year how these types of confrontations made her uncomfortable, even when she expressed having strong feelings about a particular issue. She was the type of person who would just "suck it up" rather than "complain" to someone else.

Later that same day, the girls did end up going to speak to the vice principal. However, Belinda did not join us. Max was the most adamant about wanting to talk to Mr. Begay. At first it seemed like she was just considering the idea, but the more we discussed it, the more strongly she felt about doing it. Additionally, this was the first time the girls were planning on getting the administrators (i.e., the principal and vice principal) involved in what they were experiencing with the boys. Because of that, they expressed both excitement and nervousness about speaking with the vice principal. On the one hand, there was a possibility that some of the changes they desired would actually take place, which was exciting. On the other hand, there was a possibility that nothing at all would change and that the situation would only get worse because the boys could retaliate.

I argue that the girls who went to speak to Mr. Begay about what they were feeling were on their own paths of conocimiento and were at a point where they felt compelled to take action. Specifically, I understand the girls' desire to take action as a reflection of how they were taking up "the call," another point on Anzaldúa's (2002) path of conocimiento. This point on the path of conocimiento, known as "the call…el compromiso…the crossing and conversion" is "…considered to be a point of movement where one is called to action and weighs compromises they must make" (Burciaga, 2010, p. 7). Anzaldúa (2002) uses spirituality and specifically an out of body experience to describe how one may "arrive" to the point of "the call." Through spirituality, Anzaldúa

argues, one becomes formed anew, seeing themselves as they once were and moving towards a newly reimagined self. Though I cannot make any claims about how spirituality did or did not impact the girls' consciousness development (since we did not talk often about spirituality), I do identify that their desire to speak to the vice principal was more than them just wanting to "rat" the boys out—they wanted the relationships between themselves and the boys to fundamentally change and *not* be driven by sexism. In this way, I argue that the girls were seeking to shift these relationships and make them different because they were hopeful that they *could* actually be different.

These three girls (Samantha, Max, and Lupita) were experiencing a moment of transformation where they exhibited agency against a daily oppression. In describing "the call," Anzaldúa (2002) writes,

> These states of awareness, while vital, don't last. Yet they provide the faith that enables you to continue la lucha[40]. When feeling low, the longing for your potential self is an ache deep within…[y]ou try to listen more closely, bringing all your faculties to bear on transforming your condition. (p. 556)

The girls had been actively using their facultad to inform how they were making sense of their relationships with boys. During this particular moment (in wanting to speak to the vice principal), these girls had an alternate "state of awareness" where they saw an entry point, a window of opportunity. In other words, they were bringing their faculties together in hopes of transforming their condition—by addressing the issue with boys with someone they had never addressed it with before. They, with the exception of Belinda, were willing to try and make this change knowing what it could potentially cost them—the relationships worsening. Anzaldúa (2002) writes that "…cambio[41] is hard" (p. 557)

[40] The fight
[41] Change

but it is a necessary part of the bridging process when one seeks transformation, even if that transformation is only temporary or momentary.

A dynamic that was happening in the room which became clearer to me in the spring semester than in the fall was the feeling of nos/otras (Anzaldúa, 2002; Keating, 2006, 2005) between the boys and girls. In other words, there was a divide that you could sometimes actually *feel* when both girls and boys were present. Nos/otras as I have outlined in Chapter 2, is a concept that Anzaldúa uses to describe how we are all both colonizer and colonized, mutually complicit in the oppression of others and ourselves. Although Anzaldúa purposefully splits the word nos/otras to imply this divide, she argues that within nos/otras, or within "us," lies a potential for healing. Keating (2005) elaborates on this point when she states,

> Joined together nos + otras holds the promise of healing: we contain the others, the others contain us…[in this Anzaldúa offers]…a philosophy and praxis enabling us to acknowledge, bridge, and sometimes transform the distances between self and other. (p. 7)

Throughout the majority of the school year, the divide between boys and girls due to gender performance was firmly lodged into their interactions. In other words, in so many different ways, the boys and girls constantly butted heads. In the field note that I shared above regarding "the call" that I felt the girls were engaging in, I argue that they temporarily suspended the divide in hopes that their relationships could look different. Without using the terms that I am using now as a researcher, the girls were temporarily binding together nos + otras, desiring to shift how they related to the boys in their class. This desire required the girls to shift their own perceptions of boys as just "being themselves" or in other words, as being unchangeable.

Unfortunately for the girls, speaking with the vice principal about their concerns did not produce the change they were hopeful of. In fact, as I will demonstrate below, it produced no change at all. I argue that this stark reality (that even when you work towards change it may or may not come about), pushed the girls back into a nepantla state of confusion, where they had to once again negotiate their relationships with boys on a daily basis. In clarifying how nepantla is defined, Keating (2005) writes, "[l]ike the Borderlands, nepantla indicates liminal space(s) where transformation can occur, and like the Coatlicue state, nepantla indicates spaces/times of great confusion, anxiety, and loss of control" (p. 6). Here, Keating makes a reference to the Coatlicue state on the path of conocimiento. In the Coatlicue state, "…one encounters a sense of despair and hopelessness resulting from such a significant shift in one's previous understanding about the world" (Burciaga, 2010, p. 7). Specifically, Anzaldúa (2002) describes the Coatlicue state as the resulting feeling of hopelessness that one feels when they begin to understand how systematic the world's oppressions are—feeling, in other words, as if these oppressions are completely unchangeable. In a sense, the Coatlicue state is the antithesis of "the call," characterized not by action but rather by inaction.

I utilize this particular definition from Keating because it is a useful way for me to make sense of how the girls were feeling in the aftermath of their talk with the vice principal. Although I cannot say with certainty that they were in a Coatlicue state of complete and utter despair, I did observe that they were disappointed by the lack of action from the administration in addressing their issues with boys. This is why I argue the girls were in a nepantla state but particularly highlighting the aspect of nepantla that speaks to feelings of confusion and loss of control. Additionally, in feeling like nothing had been

accomplished, it was almost as if the girls had not gone and spoken with the vice principal.

This tension further strained the relationships between the girls and boys in the college class. The excerpts that I share below took place on April 6th, the week after spring break, and highlight this point. As the school year was coming to a close, we wanted to ask students what it was that they felt they learned. Because I knew that many of the boys were not present in January when we initially brought up gender inequality, I wanted to continue presenting curricular materials that were related to this topic. But given that the relationships between boys and girls were already strained, in part by what happened with the vice principal, I was unsure as to how this would play out in the classroom. In this first excerpt, although we were not talking about the incident with the vice principal, Max is the one who brings it up during the college class.

Max: Socorro?

Socorro: Yes?

Max: They never talked to the people we told Mr. Begay about….

Socorro:…ok….

Gonzalo:…what? (in a confused voice)

Max:..you guys weren't here, it was only the girls….

Socorro:..yeah it was only the girls that were here…..

Gonzalo: Was it one of, was it me?

Max: Um, it's nothing of your concern….

Gonzalo:..ok, that means yes then.

Felipe:…was I in it?!

Belinda: No you were *not* in it for sure….

Socorro:…ok, so I mean gender is one of the things that you all talked about and today we have more boys than we usually have, so I think today is a good time to actually talk about gender.

Lupita: I have no problem with boys though.

Belinda: Yeah I have no problem…

Rosa:…yeah college class is a space for everybody….

Belinda:..it's for everybody.

Socorro: It is. But we have to be able to like listen to each other right?

In this example, Max brings up the incident when she and two other girls went to talk the vice principal. However, the boys were largely unaware of what happened. Their confusion points to what Max was saying about the issue not being addressed. Otherwise, not only would Max not have brought it up, but the boys also would not have been confused about it. In reflecting back on this particular day, I knew that I struggled pedagogically to make sense of the energy that I could feel in the room. Firstly, I did not know how to address Max's point. What should be done about the fact that the vice principal had not yet spoken to the boys? In that moment, I felt that I did not want to alienate the boys, so I did not follow up with Max's comment. At the same time, I did want to explicitly talk about gender for the reasons that the girls had been telling me—it was a conversation that we all needed to have, but that the boys particularly needed to listen to.

Not necessarily knowing how to move forward, I direct attention away from the specific incident that Max is talking about, which did involve Gonzalo (as he suspected),

and attempt to shift the focus to talking about gender inequality. However, when I make this comment, the girls then say that they "have no problem with the boys." In reflecting on this day, I feel that the reason the girls said what they did was that they did not want to make it readily apparent that they were "talking behind the boys' back." I draw this conclusion based on the fact that whenever the boys were not around, the conversation naturally moved to discussing sexism. In that way, the girls clearly *did* have a problem with the boys but I suspect (based on my pláticas with them) that they also were cautious about engaging in direct confrontation—in part because there was a potential that nothing was going to come out of it. Even though Max had no issue mentioning the conversation with Mr. Begay during class, she also did not go out of her way to give specific details about it.

I argue that how the girls chose to navigate their relationships with boys in the class and the ongoing tension between them was indicative of how they were in a state of nepantla. Though the girls had insights (facultad) about the sexism they encountered from their male peers, part of their consciousness development entailed knowing how to consistently navigate those spaces. In other words, they recognized that always "arguing" with the boys was tiring and often produced little change. They were, I argue, demonstrating their consciousness around gender discrimination by recognizing it as "battles" that had to be strategically chosen. Thus, I deduce based on the data that they did not directly confront the boys in *that* particular moment because they were strategically choosing not to. They were saving their resources and energy, I argue, for another discussion that we had later that same day in class.

This day was the same day that I showed the class a short clip of Chimamanda Adichie's Ted Talk called "We Should all be Feminists" (this was mentioned in my previous chapter). After the clips were over, I asked students to share their responses to the clips. A few minutes into this discussion, the girls begin to mention some of the issues that they have with boys in their class. The girls are never quite direct, meaning they did not point to a specific boy in the class and say it was him, or his fault. But it is clear from their tone and their examples that they are sharing these narratives in hopes that they will catch the boys' attention. The first person who shares a story similar to one that she has shared before on two occasions is Rosa.

> Rosa: So a friend of my parents came over and they told me that they saw this like movie, about a soccer team, a girls' soccer team that was really good. And the mom, she wanted them to play with the boys but the parents weren't sure about it. And then they finally like let them play with the boys but she had to convince like the soccer company…..
>
> Belinda:..coach…
>
> Rosa:..yeah, to play with them and like the boys when they were on the soccer field they were (short pause), when she was trying to convince the parents they were like 'no the boys are gonna hurt, they are gonna be too aggressive'…..
>
> Gonzalo:…it's soccer (says this as if being aggressive is no big deal)….
>
> Socorro:…hold on, let her finish, let her finish….
>
> Rosa:..like and then when they were on the soccer field the boys were saying mean things about them like 'you're not strong enough' and stuff like that. But they won….

Socorro:…ok…

Rosa:…..and then they interviewed one of the boys that was beaten and he said like, the person asked him like 'when somebody tells you, you kick like a girl, what does that mean?' And he said like 'that means that I kick really good' because the girls beat him.

Socorro: Oh ok, but usually you 'play like a girl' means a bad thing right?

Rosa: Yeah.

Socorro: Usually you don't wanna 'play like a girl'….

Gonzalo:..you are a girl….

Max:…mostly when we play soccer, hardly anyone, like any sport that we play, like in the school….

Socorro:…yeah…

Max:..they hardly ever pass it to the girls. They just only pass it to the boys…

Selena, Sara, and Rosa:…yeah….

Other girls:…uh-hmmmmm (nodding heads in agreement)….

Gonzalo: That's cuz girls are bad (he mumbles to Felipe). Just kidding (he adds quickly in the same low voice)

Socorro:…ok….

Max:…sometimes Jose passes it to me.

Jose: I do!

Gonzalo: In soccer team?

Max: Yeah….

Gonzalo: Only the 6th graders pass it to each other….

Jose:..yeah the 6th graders don't play fair….

Socorro:…so there's a couple things so, some of you guys feel like the 6th graders are not fair, some of the girls feel that the boys are not fair….

Gonzalo:..yeah they got power (referencing the 6th graders)….

Sara:…me, me, me!

Socorro: Ok Sara. And they do have power.

Sara: Whenever we are playing soccer I hate to play soccer with the boys (pauses)…

Socorro:…(pauses) ok…. (class is quiet)

Sara:…Um ok. So, I would be like, oh if I made a mistake or something they would literally scream at me like sooo bad, I would feel bad and like whenever the boys did a mistake, the boys would be like…

Rosa:..like 'it's ok'….

Sara:…they would just be like 'oh whatever.'

Boys and girls in the class: (start talking over one another but it is inaudible)

Socorro: Hold on, hold on…

Sara:…they would scream at me like I made a giant mistake….

Rosa's story about the soccer movie largely parallels the story that she told about being excluded from playing soccer with the boys in the first grade. Although what Rosa is sharing is probably true, it is interesting to note how closely her narrative about the movie matches what she herself has experienced with the boys, except Rosa never makes this connection explicit. In other words, she never admits that what happened in the movie is similar to her own experiences. When Rosa shares this experience, it prompts

Max to talk about how "they" never pass the ball to the girls when playing sports at school. Clearly, Max is referencing the boys when she says "they." She talks about her experience almost as if it was in the third person. Without naming the boys directly, she indirectly is telling them that they are the ones who purposefully do not pass the ball to the girls.

Sara, who shares her narrative after hearing Rosa's and Max's, is more direct than either of them. She says that she "hates playing soccer with the boys," and she even pauses when she says this, as if she is expecting an immediate reaction from the boys. For whatever reason, the boys do not react to her verbally in that moment. It is not until after she finishes her story that the entire class has a reaction. Sara's narrative was more purposeful perhaps than even Rosa's or Max's because she specifically names how the boys make her feel—bad. She is explicit in her narrative because she names her pain. Sara is also explicit about this being a gendered experience when she gives the example of how the boys do not scream at each other whenever they make a mistake.

I argue that in sharing their narratives, Rosa, Max, and Sara were intentionally using their experiential knowledge to challenge the boys to critically reflect on their own actions. Though they did not call the boys out directly, the girls made a conscious decision to share what they did—their narratives were not haphazard or tangential to the topic. Their intentionality in addressing the boys during class speaks to their paths of conocimiento in different ways. Firstly, as I mentioned above, they were conserving their energy to share their narratives with the boys for a moment that seemed appropriate. In this way, it is no coincidence that Rosa's narrative sparked what both Max and Sara shared immediately after. Feeling a sense of "togetherness" is what I suspect contributed

to what these particular three girls shared. Additionally, although I did not include that data here, these three girls were not the only ones who shared their personal narratives with the boys—there were three other girls who also spoke up. Their actions I argue demonstrate how they strategically shared their narratives as part of an unspoken, larger collective of girls who had similar experiences.

In sharing their narratives collectively, I further argue that the girls were, in that moment, shifting along on another point on their paths of conocimiento. Anzaldúa (2002) names this point as "putting Coyolxauqui together…new personal and collective 'stories.'" Using the metaphor of a dead body, Anzaldúa describes this point as one where you leave behind your old (dead) self, in search of re-creating a new sense of self, infused with new understandings and new conocimientos. Anzaldúa invokes the indigenous deity Coyolxauqui to describe a process of dismemberment and reconstruction that she believes is integral to developing one's conocimientos. In highlighting this point, she writes, "[a]fter dismantling the body/self you re-compose it—the fifth point of the journey, though reconstruction takes place in all points. When creating a personal narrative you also co-create the group/cultural story" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 560). In recreating the self, Anzaldúa argues that the personal narrative has implications for the larger, collective narrative particularly as it relates to understanding positionality and oppression. The girls engaged in this process as they recounted their personal narratives and experiences of sexism that were not only important to share with the boys, but to share with the boys collectively. Though their narratives demonstrated pain and hurt, the girls do not portray themselves as victims. Rather, their narratives displayed a sense of strength in their resiliency to combat sexism as young Brown girls.

Given that the girls had not engaged in this type of process before (at least to my knowledge), I found their ability to share their collective experiences of sexism to be powerful, in a way that seemed different from the instances where the girls were the only ones present. They were remaking themselves collectively via their narratives, and via their collective experience sharing it with the "others" or otras, in this case, the boys.

I presented an extensive amount of data in this chapter. I specifically selected these data because I believe they illustrate how the girls were in a process of developing their gender consciousness, or paths of conocimiento. In the first section of this chapter, I demonstrated how the girls were using pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) and theories in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) to make sense of their ongoing interactions with boys. Engaging in pedagogical practices and dialogue, the girls utilized the college class space to bond and share with each other their gendered experiences, most of which happened at school. Keeping in mind my third research question which is about how the youth in the college class space engaged in critical dialogue and self-reflection, the girls were engaging in their own forms of critical dialogue and self-reflection that were specifically related to gender inequality. The reason for that was that those were the experiences that were the most salient to them. Understanding that the college class was a space where they could share their personal experiences without being shamed (as discussed in Chapter 4), the girls used this space to reflect on the experiences they had with boys in various aspects of their lives.

The second section of this chapter examined how the girls continued to negotiate their interactions with boys and particularly the dynamic of nos/otras, us versus them, that was present in the class. Gender contributed to a divide between boys and girls, but

particularly the performance of gender that the boys enacted. Using their facultad (Anzaldúa, 2007) to theorize the actions of their male peers, the girls understood masculinity as a performance, particularly via their friend Felipe who shifted his behavior according to who he was with. The girls indirectly identified the behavior of the majority of the boys in ways that I argue, parallels what hooks (2004) writes about Black youth who put on a "ghetto minstrel show" to hide their intellectual capabilities for fear of being considered a threat.

As the girls continued throughout the school year to share their gendered experiences with one another, they began to identify a pattern within them—that they were happening almost exclusively because of their gender. In much the same way that critically conscious people of color can identify behavior motivated by racism, the girls were identifying sexist behavior—even though they never used that term. Thus, I argue that their paths of conocimiento with regard to gender discrimination specifically were spurred by a desire to seek new understandings of the world around them (Anzaldúa, 2002). Because of this, the girls moved in and between different points of consciousness along their paths of conocimiento. They did not engage in all seven points but I did identify three specific ones: nepantla, "the call," and "putting Coyolxauqui together." As I have talked about extensively, their state of nepantla was reflected in the multiple and conflicting ways they were negotiating and making sense of the actions of their male classmates. They were at times really hurt by the actions of their male peers and at other times, their actions did not bother them. At least three of the girls were in the point of "the call," when they felt compelled to talk to the vice principal about what they were experiencing with the boys in their class. Moving from a space of confusion (nepantla) to

one that was more clearly tied to action, the girls knew that talking to the vice principal was not without its implications. However, as a part of "the call," I argue these girls were motivated by a sense and hope that their relationships with boys could actually change, and were willing to risk the status of those relationships in hopes they could improve.

When approaching the vice principal proved to be unsuccessful, I argue that the girls moved into another point of consciousness, "putting Coyolxauqui together," which allowed them to collectively share their narratives of experiences of sexism, in ways that at least momentarily represented a sense of transformation. In this way, I argue that the girls in that moment shed their "old selves" and constructed a new sense of self, one that conveyed resiliency and strength, in part because they shared their experiences collectively. Though I only shared three examples in this chapter (Rosa, Max, and Sara), I used these examples as a representation of all of the girls who shared their narratives on that day.

What I hope this chapter accomplished was demonstrating the complex nature of the consciousness development process that the girls were undergoing, as well as the messiness of how that conscious development impacted relationships in the class. I centered Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento because it was a useful analytical tool for me in making sense of the girls' actions towards the boys, and their desire to reimagine their relationships with them. Though I will discuss the implications of this research more thoroughly in the next chapter, one implication of my findings from this chapter was understanding the applicability of the path of conocimiento in making sense of the lives of young Brown girls. In the next chapter, I more thoroughly examine what the various

implications are for this type of research and for critical educators who wish to engage in this type of work with young youth of color.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF DEVELOPING COUNTERSPACES WITHIN A CLIMATE OF RACIAL REALISM

In this research project, I sought to examine the process of co-constructing a Chican@ studies counterspace for and with fifth-grade Chican@ students. In doing this research, I found that the process of co-developing a counterspace with these youth entailed four components: relationship building, centering critical discourse, embracing multiple forms of self-expression, and embracing the tension of contradiction. In this way, I further extended the current conceptualization of critical race counterspaces in the literature by redefining how this term is understood: counterspaces are dynamic sites where people on the margins engage with one another in critical discourse, bring their whole (and multiple) selves, challenge each other, and make sense of the multitude of contradictions they embody, which are always present, as a means of undergoing moments of transformation. Thus, this research project helped me understand the process of how relationships are negotiated and developed within counterspaces, the tensions that can arise as a result, but additionally the moments of transformation that are made possible when we center these tensions rather than move away from them.

Additionally, through this research project, I sought to understand how the youth

were a part of the curriculum. As I have argued elsewhere throughout these chapters, a goal of counterspaces is to engage the participants within them in critical dialogues, which I deem is essentially their curricular nature. As the youth in this study reflected on the topics discussed within our counterspace, I found that in particular the girls used the counterspace as a platform to make sense of their experiences and relationships with boys at their school. The majority of the participants within this research study were girls. As a result, they sometimes were the only ones present in the college class and it was during this time that their discussions flourished around the topic of gender discrimination. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how the girls engaged in their own paths of conocimiento (Anzaldúa, 2002), specifically tied to the way they understood themselves as Brown girls in a majority Brown school.

The findings from this research project have multilayered implications for research, our understanding of elementary aged Brown youth, as well as critical social justice educators who work with youth of color. They also speak to the broader context of educational reform for diverse schooling populations and particularly the movement and resistance surrounding ethnic studies curriculum. Lastly, this research project has implications for future research and how we can continue to learn more about the lives of elementary young people as they make sense of their various positionalities.

This final chapter is organized into different but interrelated sections. These sections are for the purposes of clarity for the reader, but arguably are connected and related to one another. I first begin with providing a summary of the findings related to each of the research questions from this study. I then move to discussing the theoretical and methodological implications of this research and the nuances of working with

elementary aged Brown youth specifically. Next, I discuss the implications this research has for social justice educators who are currently doing or are interested in doing critical work with elementary aged youth of color. I highlight how the pedagogical approaches I took for this research can be particularly helpful when making sense of the contradictions we experience as critical educators working in racially realist environments. I also connect the implications for social justice educators to the broader discussions on educational reform and specifically both movements towards and away from ethnic studies curricula in k-12 schools. I conclude this chapter with a discussion on the limitations that I had for this research as well as how these limitations can inform subsequent research projects and future research that centers the lives of young people of color.

Revisiting the Research Questions

There were three primary research questions that guided this study: 1) What is the process of co-constructing a Chican@ studies counterspace for/with fifth-grade Latin@ students, 2) what types of relationships and interactions are present within this Chican@ studies counterspace, and 3) how do fifth-grade Latin@ students engage in critical dialogue and self-reflection within this counterspace? In this section, I summarize my findings as they relate to the research questions.

The first research question is addressed in Chapter 4, where I discuss what the process was like for me in co-developing a critical race counterspace with elementary Latin@ and Chican@ youth. Specifically, of primary importance to co-developing the counterspace was fostering and negotiating the relationships that were present within this

space. As I have stated at the outset of this chapter, there were four major components that I found integral to co-developing this counterspace with youth: relationship building, centering critical discourse, embracing multiple forms of self-expression, and embracing the tension of contradiction. I discuss each of these briefly below.

In developing relationships with youth in this counterspace, I found that I often took on multiple roles as one of the adults in the room. Specifically, I was a "nepantlera" adult, moving between and across multiple roles, and at times embodying these different roles all at once. I invoke Anzaldúa's concept of nepantla here to make sense of how I shifted between being a friend, teacher, educator, and family member. When the girls for example wanted me to attend their maturation ceremony at school, which is about their bodies eventually going through puberty, they demonstrated that they were comfortable enough with me for me to attend. Some girls did not want their parents or family members to attend maturation. Other girls wanted their parents, specifically their mothers, to attend but knew that they would not be able to because they had to work. In this way, I was both a family member and not at the same time because I was encouraged to attend because either 1) some girls did not want their own parents to go or 2) the girls wanted their parents to go but they had to work.

Part of our goal for the counterspace was centering critical discourse, which stems from the literature. In other words, counterspaces work to center and combat deficit notions of people of color (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Utilizing a Critical Race Curriculum (Yosso, 2002), where we centered discourses related to race and gender in particular, the counterspace focused on topics connected to understanding marginality within a broader U.S. context. The students, for example, cited a distinction between the

curriculum and topics that we discussed within our counterspace and how it differed from their traditional school day. They recognized that talking about their identity was something that we did often in the college class, but was a topic that was more indirect, and often not present, in their fifth-grade classroom. Part of what kept them attending the college class was the fact that we could engage in discussions around identity that they felt were more relevant to their everyday lives.

I utilized the scholarship of Anzaldúa and Elenes' Chican@ border/transformative pedagogies to make sense of how the youth sought to create a space where they would have their multiple selves validated and embraced. Knowing that they were often limited by how they could express themselves in school and in their classrooms, students often wanted to affirm who they believed they were and wanted opportunities to do so. In this way, we shaped the counterspace together such that they could in fact express their multiple selves. An example of this is when both Gonzalo and Jose use the word "nasty" to describe themselves in their digital project narratives. Here, specifically, "being nasty" is not allowed in schools because the students use it in a context related to sexuality, nasty meaning how much you engage in "sexual talk." Recognizing through experience that being "nasty" is not an acceptable way of being in their classrooms, Gonzalo and Jose sought to affirm in their "who am I" projects that aspect of themselves.

Embracing the tension of contradiction was another component of counterspaces, and a particularly difficult one given that many people stray from confrontation. Using Anzaldúan scholarship, I argue, however, that this contradiction and tension is a necessary part of our process of growing, learning, and transforming. It is in fact, what I argue makes counterspaces so potentially powerful and transformative. When we view

these tensions from the perspectives offered by feminist frameworks, we can shift our understanding of tensions such that we can recognize how they can lead to transformation, healing, and understanding. This is why Anzaldúa's work has been so central to my understanding of counterspaces because the tensions are actually moments of opportunity rather than despair. One of the biggest tensions that we encountered collectively was the tension that arose between the boys and girls in the class, but more specifically, how the girls felt discriminated against because of their gender. I discuss this in more depth when I summarize the findings of my third research question.

The second research question for this study is related to both the first and the third in that it focuses on understanding what types of relationships and interactions are present within the counterspace. The answer to this question can be found in both Chapters 4 and 5 in that relationships were an important factor in developing the counterspace. Specifically, relationships in part helped dictate which students wanted to participate because they were more motivated to join the class if they knew their friends would be there also. However, relationships also shifted over time and even if students initially had their friends in the class, these friendships changed. Relationships were also an important factor when making sense of my research question three in that they were tied to how students engaged with one another, particularly related to how they made sense of the curriculum. Thus, relationships often shifted over time, were tenuous, unpredictable and yet remained as a core component of co-developing the counterspace.

My third research question sought to understand how the youth were making sense of themselves in relationship to what we were discussing in class and how they then interacted with their peers. My findings for this question illuminated a process of

consciousness raising for the girls, specifically what I argue were their paths of conocimiento (Anzaldúa, 2002), as they navigated their understanding of their gender. The girls frequently brought their facultad (Anzaldúa, 2007) to the college class, making sense of their experiences with boys within a context where they understood the discrimination that women generally faced in society. This included Sara's knowledge of the word "machista," signifying that she had previously been familiar with this term and was applying it to understand how the boys in their fifth-grade class were treating them. Drawing from the pedagogies of their home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) and learning from one another, the girls engaged in discourses where they both recognized and challenged the gender discrimination they were facing from their male classmates. Through this process, the girls underwent various transformations of self, engaging in their paths of conocimiento where they at times felt empowered and at other times felt defeated. Their fluctuation and moving between different points on the path of conocimiento demonstrated the contradictions we embody living in a system of multiple forms of domination.

In this section, I summarized my findings related to the research questions in this study. Though these findings are related, I separated them by question for the purposes of clarity. The next section examines in more depth both the theoretical and methodological contributions this study makes to the literature.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions of This Research

Here, I discuss both the theoretical and methodological contributions this research study makes to the broader literatures on both CRT and Anzaldúa's borderlands. I first

focus on the theoretical contributions and then the methodological. Specifically, this study aids researchers and critical educators in furthering their understanding of critical race counterspaces by providing a more in-depth discussion of how we make sense of relationships within counterspaces, more specifically the way that dominant discourse is reproduced within counterspaces. This study also makes a contribution to the literature by extending and applying Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento to the experiences of young Brown girls, and particularly elementary aged Brown girls. The path of conocimiento as an analytical tool helps educators make sense of the way that young Brown girls navigate their various positionalities as well as the ways they engage in forms of resistance. Pláticas provided methodological contributions to this study in that they guided how I went about engaging in conversations with Latin@ youth. This way of dialoging with youth allowed for a more two directional approach to conversing with youth than traditional interviews, or other research methods. Additionally, given the nature of how young people are subjected to the dominant norms they face in school to "be quiet" and "sit still," pláticas provided a more flexible, nuanced way to balance the need to speak and be heard that young people often desire.

Counterspaces and the Path of Conocimiento With Young Latin@s as Contributing to Theory

The findings from this study contribute to the Critical Race literature on understanding counterspaces. Specifically, this study expands upon the current definition of counterspaces as they are understood in the literature, which is "…sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged" (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000, p. 70).

Utilizing an Anzaldúan framework allowed me to reconceptualize how I make sense of counterspaces, such that I now understand them as: dynamic sites where people on the margins engage with one another in critical discourse, bring their whole (and multiple) selves, challenge each other, and make sense of the multitude of contradictions they embody, which are always present, as a means of undergoing moments of transformation. Specifically, an Anzaldúan lens provided a language for me to make sense of the multiple tensions and contradictions we embody as a result of our varied positionalities. Concepts such as nepantla and nos/otras helped me view the tensions within our counterspace not as aberrant, but rather as a reflection of the way that we engaged in learning and transformation through interrogating our own subject positions.

In blending Anzaldúan thought into the logic of critical race counterspaces, I am in fact doing what Revilla (2004) does in her own work when she names a muxerista framework as combining elements of both Critical Race Theory and Chicana/Latina feminisms. Though the research of other scholars on counterspaces has aided my own approach in developing this project (Case & Hunter, 2012; Grier-Reed, 2010; Nuñez, 2011; Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, & Howard, 2013), I have relied heavily on Anzaldúan concepts to deconstruct and reflect on the process of how we co-developed our counterspace. What was particularly helpful in making sense of my research on counterspaces was understanding them as "dynamic sites" or in flux, suggesting that their nature varies and is not fixed. So although for example, a counterspace can feel like a "safe haven" for students of color on a predominantly White campus (Grier-Reed, 2010), this same counterspace can later feel unwelcoming or hostile towards queer students of color (Revilla, 2004). Hence, an implication of this research is understanding

counterspaces as fluid and dynamic, and as a reflection of the fluid nature of identity and the relationships that are developed and sustained (or not) within counterspaces.

Part of my goal in illuminating the ways that tensions arise within counterspaces is to recognize them as sites where multiple identities come into contention. The reason why this becomes important is that if we always assume that counterspaces are safe spaces or safe havens, we may be missing how they can in fact work to exclude particular identities. Thus, we must engage in a continual process of reflection so that we do not, either consciously or subconsciously, make participants feel as if they are unwelcome. Though the research that I did on counterspaces focused particularly on elementary aged Latin@ youth, I argue that this work can be extended to understand how counterspaces function at other levels, including working with adult populations. Additionally, though the majority of counterspaces have been talked about in the literature as developing within schooling institutions, this research can also aid our understanding of counterspaces that do not necessarily occur within schools.

This research project also has implications for the way that we can understand and apply the concept of the path of conocimiento to the lives of young Brown girls. Specifically, this contributes to our understanding of the path of conocimiento because it has not been applied extensively to the field of education (Burciaga, 2007; 2010), and as of the completion of this research project, not at all to the lives of elementary aged youth of color. The path of conocimiento is a complex, conflicting, spiritual journey we embark on to make sense of ourselves within the world. Despite dominant conceptualizations of youth of color as not being critically or civically engaged individuals (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Noguera, Ginwright, & Cammarota, 2006; Tuck & Yang, 2011), I

argue that using the path of conocimiento as an analytical tool helps us better understand the multiple negotiations youth make in developing their identities, forms of consciousness, and critically interpreting their social locations.

The path of conocimiento is one conceptual frame that can aid researchers and critical educators in applying a desire centered framework (Tuck, 2009b) that allows them to examine the multiple and conflicting desires of young people. In particular, the path of conocimiento provides a language with which to understand how we may, at different points in the day, feel strongly about discussing forms of oppression and then subsequently feel "over it," where we attempt to "shut off our critical lens." Nepantla, in particular, as a part of the path of conocimiento, provides a way to talk about our conflicting desires to, for example, be social justice advocates on the one hand, and listen to misogynistic "gangsta rap" (hooks, 2004) on the other. Because the path of conocimiento does not necessarily follow a linear or hierarchical pattern, it encapsulates the varied ways that we interpret and make sense of ourselves and desires even when we experience conflicting emotions simultaneously.

The two primary theoretical contributions that I discussed in this section were how this research project informed and expanded upon our understanding of critical race counterspaces, as well as understanding and applying the path of conocimiento to the lives of elementary aged Brown girls specifically. I argue that both of these theoretical contributions extend outside of their specifics in this research and can be applied to other similar contexts, such as for example, using the path of conocimiento to better understand the lives of young Latin@s or young people of color. Though I focused primarily here on the theoretical contributions, arguably, there are practical implications that are related and

tied to theory. I discuss these practical implications however, in the section in this chapter on how this research can be useful for critical social justice educators. Next, I examine the methodological implications of this study.

Methodological Implications of Pláticando With Latin@ and Chican@ Youth

My experiences working with Latin@ youth as a part of the Adelante Partnership taught me a great deal about how to speak and converse with elementary aged youth. What I noticed in the early stages of developing relationships with these youth was that they repeatedly felt that their voice was not heard or listened to. In part, this was due to their age and the assumptions that are made about the opinions and voice of young people, which is that they do not have something important to say. The other reason the opinions of young youth can be dismissed is that it is assumed that they are merely being playful, and not necessarily making profound insights or comments. It is true that young people are playful and I describe some of how this appeared within this research in Chapter 4. However, even in the middle of their playfulness or joking around, young people have vast amounts of knowledge and wisdom that frequently go unrecognized by the adults in their lives, and particularly their teachers.

Having known the participants of this study for some years prior to co-developing the counterspace, I had an idea of the patterns of communication that youth frequently engaged in. These communication patterns varied somewhat, but most of the youth expressed high levels of energy when speaking, particularly when they were comfortable with the person they were talking to. Again, in many cases, this came as a result of their

having to endure the daily school routine that included them having to sit still, being quiet in their seat, and waiting for their turn to speak. Although my initial plan for this research involved using the traditional social science method of interviews, I knew that their structure would not sufficiently account for the specific communication patterns of elementary aged youth.

In sharing ideas about research with colegas, we collectively recognized that interviews, even when done in critical ways, were limiting in how we engaged and conversed with our participants, and in my case, the young people in this study. It was during these moments of collective theorizing, and in discussing the process of engaging youth extensively with Sylvia, that I sought a different approach to dialoging with youth about their lives, one that would align more with my Chicana feminist methodological approach. Pláticas then, became one of the concepts that we discussed collectively and attempted to theorize collectively with regards to how and why we felt it was appropriate to incorporate in research. Sometime later, Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) outlined a set of contours that they identified as encompassing a Chicana/Latina feminist approach to using pláticas in research. I have discussed pláticas in extensive detail in Chapter 3. However, I highlight here the aspects of pláticas that were helpful in this research and why they are a methodological contribution to working with elementary aged youth.

Specifically, using pláticas as both a methodology and method with Latin@ and Chican@ elementary aged youth allowed me to validate their multiple ways of expressing knowledge, seeing the entire plática as part of the data, rather than only portions of the conversation. In other words, a part of plática methodology is recognizing the "plática encounter" as one that is filled with ways of knowing (Fierros & Delgado

Bernal, 2016). Thus, for example, when students are talking about their favorite television shows or music videos, it is often interpreted as being unrelated to understanding their lives. However, this knowledge is in fact an indicator of what their lives are like as contemporary young people living in today's day and age. Their use and familiarity with technology, for example, demonstrates their ability to access particular forms of information digitally. Using pláticas with young people then, allowed me to learn more about them through their sharing of their everyday lives. Pláticas also made room for how students chose to engage with myself and with one another—at times sharing private things that made them vulnerable, at other times wanting to disengage from that and talk about "fun stuff."

Another aspect of pláticas that was particularly helpful methodologically in working with Latin@ youth was their two-way, or bidirectional nature. Pláticas allowed me to engage with young people in a way that felt more natural, and allowed us to share experiential knowledge with one another in a back and forth dialogue (Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010). Given that I had already established relationships with these youth, it made more sense methodologically to have pláticas than interviews because we were already accustomed to a particular way of interacting with one another. Part of an interview strategy involves the researcher holding back on how much they interject so that more of the focus is on the interviewee. Although I agree that for particular types of research, interviews may in fact be more appropriate, in this case with young people, interviews felt more removed from how we were used to talking with one another. They added a layer of formality and authority that was not normally present (or perhaps as visible) within our various dialogues and pláticas.

Pláticas then, I argue, make an important contribution to the way that we understand research with elementary aged Latin@ youth and even by extension, youth of color. Methodologically, pláticas aligned with my own Chicana feminist epistemological approach to this project. In this way, they were based on reciprocity, vulnerability and a two-directional way of engaging in conversation (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Gonzalez, 2001). Given that I had developed established relationships with these young people, pláticas provided a way for me to still learn about their lives, without requiring that I impose a way of talking about their lives on them. Rather, pláticas allowed for us to share knowledge back and forth naturally. A plática methodological approach and method, then, can aid researchers who are interested in doing work with youth of color, whose communication patterns and styles are different from those of adults. In the next section, I discuss the implications of this research for critical social justice advocates, educators, and researchers.

Social Justice Educators Working in a Racially Realist World

Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to the persistent and historical legacy of educational neglect for communities of color as an "educational debt." Specifically, she reframes the dominant narrative of the "achievement gap," which is known as the disparity in test scores and educational outcomes between white students and students of color. She argues that the "achievement gap" only narrowly focuses on the educational inequity students of color experience, whereas the educational debt puts this inequity into a broader context of history, social policy, and the impact of white supremacy on education. Using the term educational debt, she argues, calls attention to the way that

schools have historically functioned as a sorting mechanism (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Rist, 1973), and continue to operate under the codes of whiteness (DuBois, 1994; Harris, 1993).

Understanding educational inequity as an educational debt, on the one hand, captures it as a systemic, persistent, and enduring issue. In other words, if we recognize this inequity as a debt, it highlights educational inequity as something that would take years and years to ameliorate, assuming of course this debt can be "paid off." In part, however, Ladson-Billings uses the term debt because she argues that educational neglect has accrued over the course of hundreds of years. Within that context, it is hard to imagine how this educational debt will be paid off anytime soon, or even within the next 100 years. In this way, I draw parallels between how Ladson-Billings understands educational debt and how Bell (1992) discusses racial realism, a term that I detailed extensively in Chapter 2. It can be argued that we have an educational debt because of racial realism, in that a racial hierarchy with whites at the top has long persisted in this country (and globally) for hundreds of years. Given that the codes of Whiteness dominate institutions, including schools, it comes as no surprise then that our educational system continues to fail communities on the margins.

Much like Bell, however, Ladson-Billings does not suggest that because the educational debt is massive, that we should stray from "taking it on." Rather, in a vein similar to Bell, she argues that our approach to combating the educational debt has to recognize the entirety of the problem. Otherwise, we may end up disappointed with what we expect to be the results. I argue that this research study fits within a broader critical social justice educational project, one that recognizes the persistence and pervasiveness

of the educational debt. It fits within the critical discussions that educators are having about the impact of and fight for ethnic studies curricula and the need for more educators and teachers of color within k-12 (Cammarota & Romero, 2014; de los Rios, 2013; Kohli, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). In this section, I shed light on how this research study can aid critical educators in their continued fight against the educational debt.

Given that this project focused heavily on co-developing critical race counterspaces, I argue that critical educators can form counterspaces in their own classrooms or other spaces where they engage with young people of color. Because critical educators are continually working against the grain, counterspaces are an example of a tool that can be used to develop spaces (within particular institutions) that run counter to dominant ideologies and narratives (Case & Hunter, 2012; Grier-Reed, 2010; Nuñez, 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Terry et al., 2013). Arguably, many critical educators are already engaging in a praxis of using counterspaces to do their work, even if they themselves do not call it that. What this research offers, then, is a more in-depth look into the praxis of counterspaces, but specifically, how we make sense of the tensions that we encounter within counterspaces. The findings that I presented in this research highlight the complexity and contradiction of desire, and how our conflicting desires and identities can often work in the service of domination. This is why understanding how relationships are developed and sustained within counterspaces using an Anzaldúan framework proved to be important, because it provided me with a language to center the contradictions we frequently faced.

The young people in this study expressed multiple desires and needs. They often had the desire to scream, yell, and run around in circles during class. Much of this desire came from how their bodies were constricted in school. They also simultaneously had the desire to learn and engage in critical dialogue that they knew was more off limits during the regular school day. This is why they often identified their fifth-grade curriculum as "boring," and noted that the college class curriculum was "not like school." Their multiple desires speak to their various subject positions and how they understand themselves in relationship to the world. I believe that this understanding is crucial for critical educators working with young people in understanding the multiple ways that young people embody contradiction. Just because they engage in ratchet or "hood" politics (Cooper, 2012; Lindsey, 2012), for example, does not mean they are not at all interested in learning about systems of oppression—these desires often go hand in hand.

Another aspect of this research with respect to counterspaces that I believe can be useful to critical educators are the types of pedagogies that I utilized within the classroom with young people. Both a Chican@ border/transformative pedagogy (Elenes, 2006; 2011) and a muxerista pedagogy (Revilla, 2004) allowed me to inform and frame my work within a Chicana/Latina feminist approach, one that encouraged a practice of bringing in our whole and multiple selves. Though many men of color have written about pedagogical practices with young people of color in their scholarship (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008; Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Rodriguez, 2013; Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), they often do not centralize a feminista praxis (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006) in their pedagogy. Feminist pedagogical praxis allows one to center healing (hooks, 2001; 2003),

the bodymindspirit (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), and contradiction as integral parts connected to the way that we learn and engage with one another. In particular, feminist of color frameworks center the body as a pedagogical tool (Cruz, 2001; 2013; Pendleton Jiménez, 2014). I argue that pedagogical frameworks that work to make sense of contradiction and center desire (Tuck, 2009b), can lead to recognizing and understanding possibilities for healing and transformation. Such frameworks can not only be useful in making sense of the lives of young people, but additionally our own lives as we rationalize our desire to engage in social justice acts in a system that we know is largely unchangeable.

Lastly, this research also adds to the broader literature on why ethnic studies based approaches are useful in schools for all students, but particularly students of color (Akom, 2011; Cammarota & Romero, 2014; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2011; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Specifically, the counterspace was structured using a Critical Race curriculum (Yosso, 2002), that incorporated Chicana/Latina ways of knowing (Revilla, 2004). Though ethnic studies literature often focuses on high school aged populations, I along with other scholars argue (Picower, 2012; Tintiangco-Cubales, 2009) that ethnic studies can and should be utilized in elementary school classrooms and with elementary aged youth. Specifically, Tintiangco-Cubales has long been involved with Pin@y Educational Partnerships, an educational pipeline that she founded, grounded in ethnic studies based educational approaches (Pin@y Educational Partnerships). She has authored detailed material for teachers, including curriculum models for critical educators working in particular with Filipin@ students (Pin@y Educational Partnerships). Picower (2012) has outlined a set of six

elements that she argues are integral to critical educators developing social justice curriculum for elementary aged populations. Though the work of these two scholars is important to understanding how to engage elementary aged youth of color in critical inquiry, there is a need for more research on the effects of ethnic studies on this age group. This research project provides one example of what Chican@ studies praxis can look like with elementary aged Brown youth. It was clear from this study that young Chican@ and Latin@ youth craved access to a knowledge base that reflected their own familial and communal ways of knowing.

Although ethnic studies educational approaches have been largely under attack due to their perceived threat to whiteness (such as the ban on Mexican American Studies that currently stands in Arizona, HB 2281), there has also been an increased push for school districts to pass ethnic studies course requirements in k-12 (Ethnic Studies Now! Coalition). In California, for example, though Governor Brown vetoed a bill that would require ethnic studies in k-12 for all school districts in the state (CA AB 101), there are nine districts that have made ethnic studies courses a requirement for graduation, and another six that have added ethnic studies curricula into their districts (Ceasar, 2015). The fact that ethnic studies has come under attack in k-12 is not surprising, given again, the educational debt that maintains Whiteness and disproportionate educational outcomes for students of color. However, this reality should not undermine the real effort that activists/scholars have taken in not only producing research that supports ethnic studies curricula and pedagogy, but also working to subvert Eurocentric curriculum by infusing ethnic studies.

Connected to the idea that ethnic studies curricula and pedagogy provides a supportive and critical environment for young people of color to reflect on their positionalities, many scholars argue that teachers of color provide valuable insights into the world of racism and discrimination that they share with their students (Katsarou, Picower, & Stovall, 2010; Kohli, 2009; 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Though the demographic of teachers nationally remains approximately the same, with the majority (80%) being White (Ladson-Billings, 2006), teachers of color often do not require the same amount of "racial training" that White teachers must undergo in order to not perpetuate racism (Kohli, 2009). Thus, as ethnic studies requirements for largely diverse, "urban" districts become a reality, the question of who will teach ethnic studies remains relevant. It is this very question that Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014) undertake in their research on ethnic studies pedagogical practices. Given that many teachers of color have undergone (and still experience) various forms of discrimination tied to race, class, gender, and sexuality, their life experiences allow them to connect with their students in ways that White teachers have to learn, rather than already know (Kohli, 2009). Although I argue that my research has implications for critical educators across the board, I also recognize how my research evolved as a result of my own k-12 experiences, which I detailed in Chapter 3. Thus, I target my research and its implications to educators of color who can better understand the complexities associated with making sense of our conflicting desires as educators combating the educational debt.

In this section I have examined how this research study fits within a broader discourse and understanding of the educational debt owed to marginalized communities.

Critical educators are constantly working within a racial realist environment that strives to maintain Whiteness and White racial superiority. However, even in light of racial realism, there are moments of possibility that exist within the spaces that critical educators develop. One example of such spaces, I argue, are counterspaces. The research that I have presented on counterspaces here reflects the way that critical educators have to work against the grain in educating communities that have been historically neglected. Utilizing feminist of color frameworks within counterspaces, as I have done in this research, presents possibilities to recognize moments for transformation that might otherwise be ignored or missed. Anzaldúan scholarship, for example, allowed me to examine contradiction and tension as a space for healing and transformation. The next section of this chapter examines the limitations of this research as well as the future directions for educators who wish to research alongside elementary aged Latin@ youth.

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

Despite the important findings and contributions this research project makes, I also acknowledge its limitations, and how these limitations can inform directions for future research. In particular, one area of limitation that I believe can be explored in future research would be understanding how elementary aged Brown youth negotiate their sexuality and sexual identity. Specifically, though this research took an approach where we purposefully attempted to erode traditional schooling boundaries (such as for example discussing race and racism openly in the college class) there was more work that needed to be done in the area of queering the counterspace in multiple ways, but particularly connected to how young people understand sexuality and romantic desires.

Part of the reason why queering the counterspace became difficult was tied to both the conservative, religious context of Salt Lake City, as well as the age of the young people whom I worked with. I am not suggesting that these young people did not understand their sexuality because of their age, but rather that the adults in their lives were often unwilling to acknowledge that even as early as 10 and 11 years old, young people could have desires tied to their sexuality. For example, Lupita mentioned on a few occasions how whenever she talked about "getting a boyfriend" with her mom, that her mom would get upset and told her "que ni piense en eso hasta que termine la escuela."[42] In turn, Lupita internalized this to mean that it was not acceptable for young girls her age to want or have a boyfriend. Though she expressed some desire in having a boyfriend, she understood her mother's words to mean that first she had to prioritize school and not a romantic relationship.

There was also a stigma attached to how girls and boys behaved in romantic relationships at school that the students understood through experience. For example, during one of the pláticas, the girls talked about a sixth-grade girl who was dating a boy in their class. They would giggle nervously whenever they talked about how this couple kissed openly in public, both on and off school grounds. According to Selena, their kissing escapades were "like from a novella."[43] They (and other people in the school) felt like this girl had "no shame" in kissing her boyfriend in and around the school. They would further reproduce narratives about this girl as having "too many boyfriends" because she was always with "someone new." These narratives and stigmas about dating that circulated around school were harder to combat because they involved the multiple

[42] Don't even think about that until you finish with school.
[43] Spanish TV drama

views that students had about sexuality, derived both from home and larger society. In this regard, some students and their families were part of the LDS church and expressed conservative views when it came to sexuality. Other students would say it does not matter who you like, but would then comment that two boys kissing "was gross."

Thus, a future direction for this research would be to more thoroughly examine and interrogate how young Brown youth make sense of sexuality and discrimination based on sexuality and gender expression. Though we touched upon these topics when we would talk about gender discrimination, there clearly remained a need to discuss homophobia with youth. Cruz (2013) and Revilla (2004) along with many other queer feminists of color including Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde, recognize the ways that homophobia can be reproduced within our own communities. For this reason, discussing sexuality and romantic desire more openly with youth and even with their families can aid in preventing queer youth from feeling ostracized.

Another limitation of this study that can be useful when thinking about future research would be examining the longitudinal effects of how young people who are exposed to critical discourse make sense of themselves in their teenage and adult years. In other words, a question that I did not ask for this research but would be interested in learning more about is: Are there ideas/concepts from the college class that the youth use to make sense of their lives as they transition into middle and high school? And subsequently, did their participation in the college class aid them in any way in making decisions about their academic futures? My facultad (Anzaldúa, 2007) and cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) when thinking about these two questions tells me that yes, there is discourse that the youth use from their experiences in the counterspace that

has aided them in their continued efforts to make sense of themselves. However, the question then becomes, which discourses specifically and how? These, I think, are the important considerations that future research should contemplate not only when thinking about how elementary aged youth of color continue to make sense of themselves as they become older, but also in relationship to the impact and effect that ethnic studies has for youth of color specifically.

Latin@ Youth Resiliency in the Borderlands

I conclude this chapter and research study by reminding the reader that despite the difficulties that Latin@ elementary aged youth endure in their lives, they are resilient individuals. Drawing from the strength of their home and families, many of the youth whom I worked with were low income and understood the struggles associated with their Brown, low-income, immigrant positionality. Their subject positions informed their facultad (Anzaldúa, 2007) about the world and their desire to become professionals later in life so they would not have to work low wage jobs like many of their parents and even older siblings. Though my own life experiences were of course different, the narratives that these youth shared about themselves and their families reminded me in many ways of my own childhood. Their hopes and dreams for the future were similar to the ones that I had at their age.

In a sense, their resiliency in dealing with the material realities they encountered helped breathe life back into me, so to speak. In a way that I cannot fully describe, there is something about working with young people that changes you. Their brilliance helps you see the world in a way that you could not before. Though I initially hoped that this

research would aid to familiarize them with critical discourses that I did not learn until I was a young adult, I found that their resiliency was doing more for me than I felt I was doing for them. In this way, I acknowledge how my research can be seen as selfish, and once again it speaks to the history that researchers have of "extracting" information from their participants without giving much in return (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Recognizing this history and the problematics of research that I described in Chapter 3, I did not intend this research to be purely selfish. However, I recognize how it oftentimes felt, the "uncomfortable reflexivity" (Pillow, 2003) that I constantly found myself navigating. Nonetheless, I still wish to highlight here the resiliency of young people who have much to say but who are limited in multiple ways by how much they can speak.

I conclude this chapter with the written text of the digital final project done by two young Brown girls, Selena and Guadalupe. Having parents who immigrated from Mexico, both Selena and Guadalupe were second-generation immigrants, that is, born in the U.S. Selena and Guadalupe often had a lot to say during the college class and in our pláticas about the everyday realities of living as young Brown youth in Salt Lake City. With ties to both Mexico and California, they often talked about traveling back and forth to see their family members. Desiring to attend college, Selena and Guadalupe often talked about how their parents wanted them to succeed in school so that they could have a good job that paid well. They both had older siblings they looked up to, but who experienced difficulties in school. Through their older siblings, they came to understand the challenges that both middle school and high school would present, and in particular were worried about teachers that would make overtly racist comments and generally speaking would not care about their educational trajectories.

I share the text of their digital narratives because I believe that it demonstrates the way that these two young girls express themselves and their resiliency. In particular, Selena highlights singing and dancing as a coping mechanism to moments when she feels "sad" or alone. She also expresses how she is proud of her parents because they "would do anything" for her and her siblings. I argue that Selena, as a second-generation immigrant, recognizes the struggles that her parents have had to endure as a result of coming to a new country and trying to form a better life. Selena's resiliency then, in part derives from her family's own experiences and the life lessons of her parents and family members.

Guadalupe's narrative was also important to highlight because of the many positive affirmations that she expresses about herself. Calling herself "beautiful" and a "genius," I argue that the positive views young people of color express about themselves need to be validated because of the constant messages they receive about looks, body image, and overall appearance. Particularly for young people of color, feeling beautiful and actually believing it can be difficult because of the constant messages they receive that tell them all the ways that they should not love themselves (hooks, 2003). Demonstrating both creative self-expression and resiliency, I argue that both Selena and Guadalupe are examples of the many ways Latin@ young people navigate their multiple worlds and life experiences. Below, are their digital narratives in written form, starting first with Selena's and then Guadalupe's:

> This is me, Selena. I am an 11-year-old girl in fifth-grade. I go to Connor Elementary, born in Denver, Colorado on January 8th, 2004. Mis padres son Mexicanos, pero mis hermanos y yo somos Chicanos. My favorite hobby is playing soccer. I love listening to Becky G and Fifth Harmony. When I am sad or alone in my room, I like to sing and sometimes dance. Sometimes I feel like I want to be a dancer but sometimes I really want to be an orthodontist. I'm really

glad that I'm part of my parents because they love me, they care for me, and I am proud because they would do anything to have the best for us.

Hi, I am Guadalupe, I'm going to be telling you guys about myself. I am special, I am unique, I am beautiful, I am a Chicana, I am Mexican, I am a genius. I am from Salt Lake City, Utah. I am sporty. I am a catholic. I am awesome. I am a sister, I am a person. I am human, I am Guadalupe. I am crazy. I am a girl. I am a Pacquiao lover. I am a boxing lover. I am creative. I am funny. I am the second youngest. I am a 1D (1 Direction) lover. I am a future doctor. I have a YouTube channel and I have a snapchat.

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